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Ph.D., D.C.L.  
EDWARD ARNOLD, 300

IN PRESS.

What has become of  
the last generation  
of men? In the last  
few generations the  
world has been  
transformed. The  
old world has been  
destroyed, and the  
new world has been  
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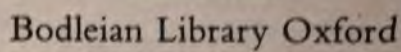
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will be continued in the

LONDON, 1880

















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THE  
STORY OF MY GIRLHOOD.

BY  
MRS. HENRY LYNCH.



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"Seest thou shadows sailing by,  
As the Dove, with startled eye,  
Sees the Falcon's shadow fly?"

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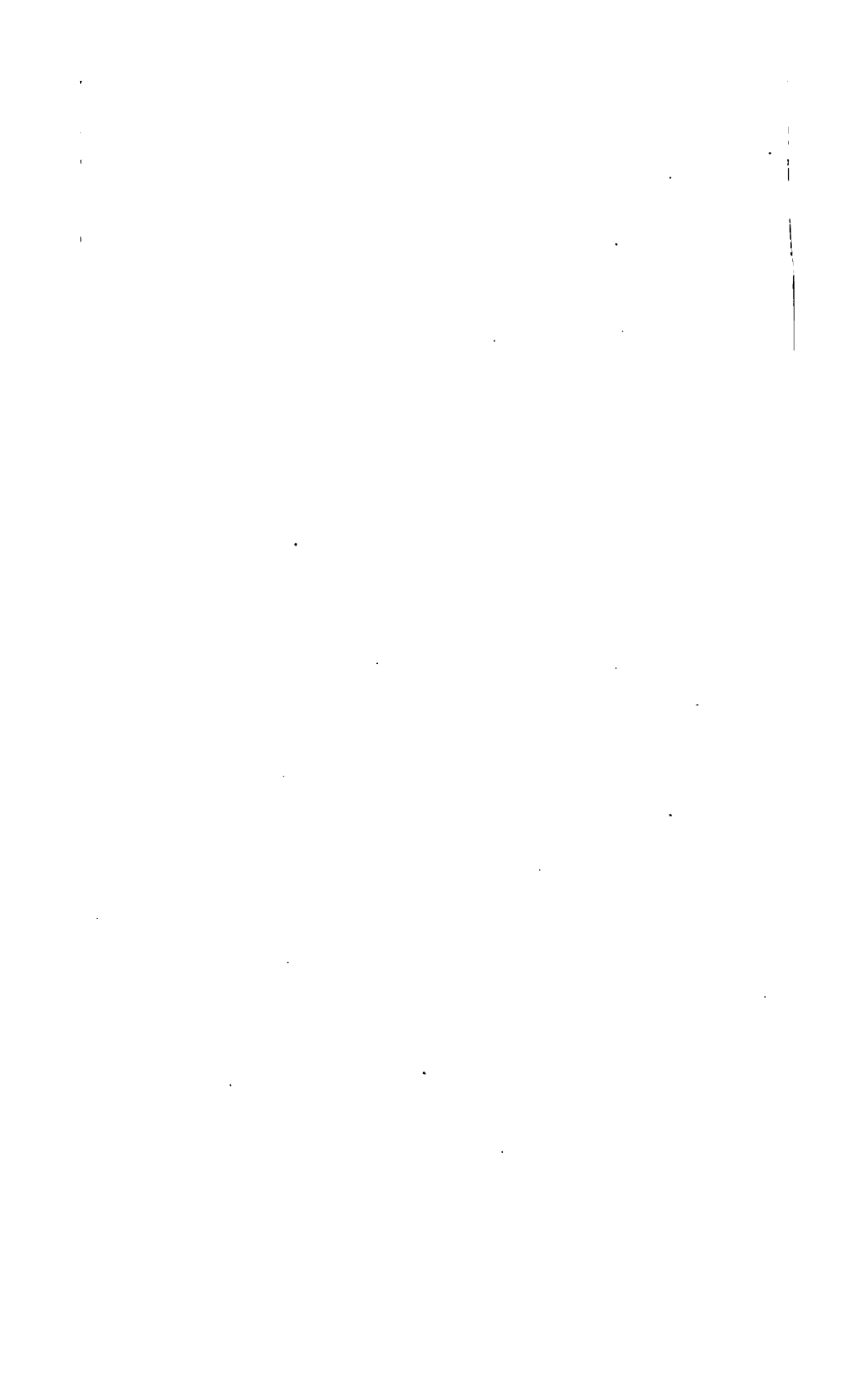
**I Dedicate this Volume,**

**BY PERMISSION,**

**TO**

**CHARLES DICKENS, Esq.,**

**" Whose pleasant books all silently among  
Our household treasures take familiar places,  
And are to us as if a living tongue  
Spoke from the printed leaves or pictured faces."**





# THE STORY OF MY GIRLHOOD.

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## I.

I WISH you could have seen my home, for I am quite sure I shall not do justice to it in my description.

It was not a stately home, neither was it a cottage home, but it was a venerable old place, without any grandeur but that which it derived from time.

So beautiful and tranquil it was, letting the silvery daisies grow close to its sides, and spreading out its ivy-fettered arms to raise the drooping honeysuckles.

I love this old home so very much, that I am afraid of writing too partially about it. But how can I help it?

Were not my father, and mother, and sister the soul of the dear old place? and my love and reverence for it are unbounded.

Snatches of landscape came passing in through openings in the dense dark foliage of the trees, around whose arching boughs formed a natural gothic framework for the soft purple picture beyond.

I always loved the picturesque wherever it was to be found. A country girl, in her sunburnt beauty, sitting on a stile, would fascinate me ; and before I was ten years of age, I remember sketching—and I believe with some degree of propriety—a group of haymakers under an old walnut-tree, passing round the beer-can.

My very affections were, so to speak, pervaded by this love of the beautiful.

My father's noble appearance was my pride, my triumph ; whilst the fairy-like delicacy of my sister Edith's complexion suggested to my childish fancy the idea of a link between her and the angels.

My mother was one of those soft and pre-eminently feminine creatures whose very presence appeals to one for help, encouragement, and cherishing tenderness.

The expression of her countenance was always rather melancholy. This accorded so well with her classical features, that I should scarcely have liked it altered ; but when it deepened into uneasiness, which it sometimes did, I marvelled ; for I thought, within the walls of that home, and with life so placid around her, with what had she to do but contentment ?

I was a very young girl then, and knew nothing of the lesson I have since learned ; but this is not to the purpose.

One morning, when she was more than usually unhappy, I asked her what troubled her, and this brings me to the commencement of my own narrative.

## II.

"COME here, my darling, sit by me on the sofa," she cried, and she paused, as if trying to fortify herself for what she had to say. If possible, there was more tenderness than ever in her voice, as she continued, "You must not let it make you unhappy. I mean what I am about to tell you, but mamma feels she has not long to live. I yield to this persuasion, not from any tokens or superstitions, but simply because I cannot help it."

"You will not die, dearest mamma," I said; "God will not let you die," and I laid my head on her bosom, and wept. Her tears mingled with mine, but she was the first to recover her self-command, and then she told me kindly, and almost cheerfully, not to be downhearted, but to listen to her like a little woman, for that she had a great deal to say to me.

There was something so re-assuring in her smile, so encouraging in her voice, that I was soon set to rights, and ready to attend to her.

"My dear love," she said, "if I die, your father will

most certainly marry again." This was entirely a new thought for me. "It is natural, and I dare say right, that he should do so, especially as I was never exactly—. But no matter; he will marry, and thus place you and Edith under the dominion of a step-mother." This was indeed a view of the future which had never presented itself to me. My heart rose up against it in a bound.

"I never will submit to any new mamma," I exclaimed, rising, and indignantly pacing up and down the room. "I would leave home, I would beg my bread, before I would bend my will to an usurper."

My mother was accustomed to my impulses and impetuositities, and therefore was not in the least surprised at my excitement.

I was fifteen years of age, and certain dreamy notions of womanhood as being at no very distant period, had been floating through my mind, so that any thought of control was particularly unpleasant to me.

"Papás do not think of their daughters' fancies when such things are in contemplation," said my mother, looking very sad; "and I tell you plainly, when I am gone, he will bring a young bride to his table."

"Oh, mamma, dear mamma," I exclaimed, "how can you place such dark pictures before me? What will become of us if you die?"

"Listen, my love," she said, looking earnestly at me, with some confusion and hesitation in her manner, as if she wished and yet feared to speak to me of what was in her heart.

"I believe it is in my power to remedy this evil, at least, so far as you are concerned."

"If I become strong and well again, the step I wish you to take will do no harm; on the contrary, it will benefit you; and if I die, you will, all your life, bless me for securing independence for you."

"What can you mean, mamma?" I said, awakened to the most lively curiosity by her look and manner.

"Can you remember, a few years back, when Lynn Forrester was staying with us? Can you remember him, a bright intelligent boy, with sunny brown hair, curling almost like a woman's? Such a cricketer, too, he was, that he almost lured your papa to be a boy again."

"I recollect him well," I replied: "he was always giving me candy and oranges, and he called me his little wife."

"He would marry you now, my dear," said my mother, "if you would only consent to be his bride."

I am sure it was an effort to her to say this. I saw that it was; she said it in a hurried and distressed way, and with a considerable degree of agitation. There

was something in her manner which even seemed to ask my forgiveness for what she had said.

"I could not do that," I replied; "I must love the man who is to be my husband. Oh, no, not that; anything but that. Let me try some other plan to escape from this horrid step-mother."

She seemed perplexed and disappointed; and now, as I look back, I think she was hurt at the abrupt way in which I expressed my opinion.

"Poor child! poor child!" she said, gently, and very tenderly, passing her hand over my cheeks and brow, and then she left me alone,—alone, on the old high-backed sofa,—alone, in the same quiet-loving room in which she had received me, her first-born, as a gift from God.

### III.

ALTHOUGH trusting my mother very much, and loving her very dearly, I could not think of her strange plan for my happiness with anything like a pleasurable or even composed feeling.

I reflected how she had shrunk even from her own suggestion, although she had afterwards pursued it with a fervour and earnestness, which made me feel more than

anything else how serious must be the evil of a step-mother.

Another light, too, had broken in on me from that conversation. I felt quite sure that my father and mother were not altogether happy in each other. I was as convinced of it as if I had known it for years ; and though my mother was good, and gentle, and true, and my father benevolent and high-minded, their good qualities seemed to remain separate and distinct, and not to mingle and blend for the happiness of both.

Now I came to think of it, there were so many things that told me this.

My mother's abstracted and sorrowful look said it ; and my father, though warm-hearted, and, in a general sense, fond of home, did not certainly find his happiness at my mother's side.

All these considerations suggested themselves to me as I sat on the old sofa in the dim bedroom. Perhaps they had married from interest or obligation ; and if I were to act in the same way, it would break my heart—Oh ! it would break my heart.

I was very young, and not very logical ; and no sooner had this reflection distressed me, even to weeping, than the apparition of a step-mother, stern and cold, haughty, and exacting obedience, rose up before



me ; and, in the dread that came over me, my mother's plan of escape lost its harsher features, and seemed invested only with ardent love for me.

"Tea waits, Miss," said the servant. Was it possible ? Had I sat there for two hours ?

It was so, indeed ; but, then, this was my first introduction to anything like earnest thought, and it had a great deal to say to me.

I am afraid that I passed out of the light and careless land of childhood on that very evening. I am afraid of it, because a certain restlessness had taken possession of me, and Edith, who was but a few years younger than I, seemed suddenly at an immeasurable distance from me. Yes, it must have been so. From that day, life all at once became real.

#### IV.

WE never had any trouble to find amusement when my father was with us : he could draw it out of the rocks and stones on our path.

When in his unreserve with his children, there was an enjoyment about him which made us feel, for the time being, that he was, in spirit, almost one of us. All the young folks in the neighbourhood loved him ;

it was only some of the older ones who thought him proud. He had a great deal of influence amongst us, and amongst the poor. Who was so much thought of as Squire Falconer?

If they were not on familiar terms with him, they relied on him, and did not fear him; and this reliance led them often to acquiesce in his judgment, even when he pronounced sentence against them.

Edith and I had many associates,—girls in the sweet flush of youth, glowing in the exquisite freshness of that early time.

At the western side of our house there was a green hollow, which we named the "Dingle."

It was interspersed with clumps of trees, and on the banks, as they rose, were scattered cottages—not stiff, prim-looking houses, with their only title to such a name in the painted letters on their gateways, but real rural dwellings, that the eye loved to rest on; so picturesque, that one felt half inclined to fancy they could have nothing to do with such common-place materials as bricks and mortar. They were thatched, and had gable ends, and jutting out windows, on which the sun, as it set, scattered diamonds, and flowers climbed even to the chimneys.

In the depths of this dell there was sometimes a

tiny brook, which could not live during the sultry months of summer, but was born in the autumn, and lingered till spring was gone.

We had pic-nic parties there in the summer ; and in those days I never felt weary. Sometimes we danced and sung amongst the flowers, and the birds were not merrier than we,—my father going in and out amongst us all the while, till he took off two or three of the merriest as prisoners, and, rambling with them over the hills, led them on insensibly into pleasant and profitable conversation.

He had a great distaste for anything like silly gossiping amongst girls. He said they were born for something better than to sport with scandal.

Of politics, history, philosophy, and poetry, he sometimes conversed with us, simplyfying by his expressions the most abstruse points ; bearing with our ignorance as patiently, and listening to our remarks as attentively, as if he were benefited by them.

Sometimes he would put us all right by a question ; but that was a way of his own. Oh, we were happy, very happy, then !

## V.

As I look back down the long vista of years, I find that

a haze has gathered round the memory of my youthful companions, but some of them I can discern in spite of the mists of time.

I seem to see Amy Robins before me now, with her pretty *petite* form, and deep rosy cheeks. She was almost always laughing; only, if you told her this was a *ruse* to show her pearly teeth, she screwed up her mouth, and tried to look cross; and then I thought her pouting lips suited her better than her merry mood.

She was a regular apron-fancier, and pretty little aprons she wore.

One day they were black silk, embroidered with violet; the next, sky-blue, with snow-white braid, tracing out roses or convolvuluses; on the third, she would, perhaps, wear a clear muslin, with a deep, dark border, and so on.

I do not in the least remember any other part of her dress, but I find it difficult, nay, impossible, to separate her in memory from those cross-way pockets in which both those fat little white hands were for ever nestling.

Then there was Gatty Henderson,—a book-worm we called her, because she was always reading. She was short and stout, with a soft, dimpled, round face, her head for ever bending over some closely-written page;

and then you saw to advantage her small Grecian nose and short upper lip.

Sometimes, however, she took a sudden fancy to crochet or knitting, and, from her temporary devotion to work, you would be inclined to think she gave all her most earnest thoughts to it; but we, who know her better, knew it was only a kind of spasmodic influence, which would yield if she came within the shadow of a book. I have known her, when my father was in town, positively take possession of the library, and sit there on the mahogany steps till twilight threw its veil over the page.

Ada Beaconsfield was more elegant than either Amy or Gatty,—tall and symmetrically formed, with a swan-like neck, and a classical contour of face. There was an elasticity and an airy lightness about her, which caused her, turn which way she might, to be singularly graceful.

My father used to say in his straightforward way, "Annie, I had often heard of the poetry of motion, but I never understood it till I knew that girl." But I must finish my picture.

Ada was very feminine in appearance, in manner, in heart.

She had deep violet eyes and black hair; her cheeks,

which were generally pale, flushed at the will of every passing emotion.

She was very retiring, and yet I never knew any one who appreciated good society more than she did ; by which I simply mean, that she enjoyed being with those to whom she could look up for instruction and direction.

At times a peculiar expression lighted up her whole face ; and though essentially one of us, weeping with us when we wept, and rejoicing with us when we rejoiced, I am sure there were moments when she rose above us all into the serene and spotless atmosphere of holy thought ; and then a beauty was shed on her, which gave her a spiritual appearance, a loveliness perhaps altogether independent of form or feature.

I am positively afraid, sobered by time as I now am, to write of Ada Beaconsfield, lest I should glide into the enthusiastic.

She was always so upright, so calm, yet warming up in a moment into the deepest sympathy. Then she was so fond of me, and had such confidence in me.

Ah, me ! Why do my tears fall at the recollection of all I felt for her during that early period of my girlhood ?

But this will never do.

My pen has been lying listlessly in my hand for half an hour at least.

I have been musing, I have been thinking, how, at the commencement of life, our perceptions are often warped by prejudice, whilst our judgment is obscured by passion. We have generally travelled some leagues on life's pathway, before regret and self-condemnation overtake us ; but I must not at present moralize.

## VI.

AMONGST our many visitors at Elm Hall, a very few float on the surface of the sea of memory ; and of these I shall speak from time to time as I go on with my tale.

I think my father showed a good deal of partiality for Dr. Slaffen, though they were dissimilar in many things.

The doctor was a native of Germany, but, having spent almost all his life in England, he had not the slightest appearance of a foreigner ; but he possessed, as by inheritance, an odd broad dialect, which greatly distorted his English.

My father would have had us believe that he only tolerated him on account of his extraordinary and genuine simplicity ; but I knew better. He was liberal



in his opinions, and extremely free from prejudice ; and on this broad ground my father always met him pleasantly. Dr. Slaffen was a middle-aged man, short, and dark, and square, ever ready to do an act of kindness, and earnest in all he did.

When in a serious mood, so intense was his gravity, that the wrinkles of his frown reminded you of cart tracks in a muddy road ; and when he laughed, there was something so full and sonorous in the tone, that a degree of importance attached itself to his merriment, which made you often listen to it without any responsive laugh. He had a curious habit of continually drawing diagrams.

It was dangerous to oppose him in argument. If you did so, the pencil and paper appeared as by magic ; and by a given line from A to B, you were soon compelled to own that the point in question had neither length, nor breadth, nor thickness.

He was a doctor in medicine, but I never remember to have heard him discuss physic.

With divinity, I am sure, he had never had much to do, though at times he would talk sensibly enough, but always after the fashion of a clever schoolboy.

I remember one evening he put me out terribly by his mathematical and logical nonsense.

Mamma had been talking to me a great deal that day about Lynn Forrester. She had actually been urging me to marry him privately, saying that she would give me her full sanction and her blessing.

I can recall the tones of her voice now, as she entreated me to do this for her sake, though I knew, from the very nature of the case, it was only my good she had in view.

I could not at all overcome the dread I had of an action so important, so full of responsibility; and yet I began to get more accustomed to the thought, and so to look at it with less fear. Then there were mystery and secrecy enveloping even our conversations on the subject, and this by degrees became pleasing to me.

But on the evening to which I have referred, Dr. Slaffen began to rule lines and make triangles as fast as ever he could on sundry pieces of white paper, which he scattered ruthlessly on the drawing-room table; and these diagrams were all to prove that no girl should marry before she was twenty.

I thought my mamma looked a little disconcerted, whereupon I felt a degree of importance at the grave secret existing between us. I felt, however, exceedingly distressed on my mother's account, for she became pale and fidgety; and though I was persuaded she was

urging me to take a rash and uncertain step towards the attainment of happiness, I learned that evening how much she was willing to brave, to suffer, for her child.

## VII.

PERHAPS, after all, it was this knowledge which led me to yield to her persuasions.

With her dear approval, I could not be very wrong. She must have good reason for not telling my father. I could surely trust love such as hers.

I told her so, and she wept for joy.

"Then my darling will be safe," she said, "safe from a step-mother; and though for some little time you must necessarily remain as strangers to each other, I am convinced you will one day be his happy wife." She said this in an earnest manner, and with a solemn tone; and as I looked in her dear face, and thought of all her goodness and tenderness to me, my fears melted away under the influence of my unbounded confidence in her.

My father, during the week following this conversation, went over to Germany with Dr. Slaffen, and, on the third evening after his departure, Lynn Forrester arrived as our guest.

He was a young man of one or two and twenty, fair, and very boyish-looking, but well proportioned, with just that expression of face which we call intelligent, and which, from that circumstance alone, had no inconsiderable claim to the beautiful.

I was very childish in appearance, not yet having taken that spring in growth so common to girls of my age.

"Annie," he said, in a light, easy way, when we were alone on the lawn together, "mamma says you are to be my little wife." He looked quite cheerful and contented, and drew me towards him as he spoke.

"Is it with your right good will that this secret marriage is to take place between us?"

I had just separated from a merry party of girls, for we had been throwing nuts at each other in the Dingle. My cheeks were in a glow from recent exercise, and laughter was still lingering on my lips; but this simple question put all my gladness from me. It was a question I had never once asked myself.

It never occurred to me to dissimulate; so, pausing a moment, and then looking up into his face, I replied, "I do not think it is, but I wish to do what mamma tells me will be such a comfort to her."

"Very bravely and prettily answered," he said; but he

gave a deep sigh, and looked so serious and uneasy, that it suddenly passed through my mind, it could not be very pleasant to him to take a wife reluctantly, especially as he was urged on by no loving mother to the act ; and, hesitating and blushing, I told him my fears.

"Dear girl," he said, and he took my long curls lightly and playfully between his fingers ; then, without immediately replying to me, he only added, "I think it would have been better, Annie, could we have waited a little while, so that I should have had time to make love to you, till I should have made myself so agreeable to you," he continued smiling,— "should have become so kind a friend, that you would have been able to think of mamma's wish with pleasure. Do you understand me, Annie ?" "Yes," I answered, "and perhaps you could make this arrangement now."

"No, no," he replied, smiling ; "mamma will not be put off. I have given her my word of promise, and we must hope, Annie,—hope that some day we shall be happy together."

"That is mamma's trust," I said, "and she must have very great confidence in you, or she would not urge me on, and tell me so often of the happiness I shall feel in having performed a noble duty," and then I fell into a reverie, standing there by his side, and I heard

him say, "Duty, duty," in a tone of discomfort, as he walked slowly on to the house before me.

Suddenly he turned back, and took hold of my hand with a smile, saying he had left his manners in the great metropolis ; and we entered the house together.

### VIII.

I WAS so young and so very childish in appearance, that no one thought of a jest on our account, though we had been talking earnestly together in the old avenue just before the large windows of the dining-room.

So far as I was concerned, I am sure I had been very much in earnest ; for I generally was so full of frolic, that my father said it was impossible to get anything like connected conversation from me.

Edith and my young companions were there, working and talking together as quietly as if they had not been racing after nuts with me in the Dingle.

I must have been longer with Lynn than I had imagined.

I cannot tell why, but of that evening I have a peculiar recollection.

Perhaps, as I looked at them all in the careless gladness of their girlhood, I felt, with something like regret,

how soon I should be separated from that hopeful time, how soon I should be immersed in graver thoughts and feelings, carrying about with me a responsibility all the heavier from the secrecy which was to hang over it.

Gatty Henderson had set herself down to some very large knitting,—a quilt for her grandmother, I think,—on which she was bestowing an enormous amount of industry, this being one of her spasmodic working days.

Ada Beaconsfield was reading—reading to herself under the shadow of the rose curtains; for we all pleased ourselves at Elm Hall, and never allowed ceremony to seat us formerly on the sofas, chaining us there in heavy idleness.

How light of heart, how happy she seemed!

I was oppressed—I could not even smile. Surely, surely, there was something very serious in the tie I was about to form.

With these feelings strong upon me, I went up to my mother.

It is possible we might have entered into argument, and I might have told her of my foolish feelings of discomfort, had she not been sleeping—sleeping on the broad, old-fashioned sofa of which I have before made mention.

She must have been weary with her walk that morning, so what could I do but kiss her very gently, so as not to awaken her, and then return to my companions with an odd feeling of womanhood creeping over me, with which Ada, who was some years older than I, seemed to have nothing to do?

I did not see much of Lynn after this conversation; at least, we were not alone together; and, though he always maintained a light and playful manner with me, I fancied he was much more at his ease with Edith, and I think I felt as if I had rather it should not have been so.

Perhaps we should have become real friends, if I could have forgotten this marriage scheme, and if he could have remained with us; but this was not to be.

## IX.

WHAT a pretty little bonnet my mother bought me! But this was nothing uncommon; she was for ever buying something new for her dears.

It was airy and light in its texture, and white, pure snow white, with a wreath of pale pink rose-buds represented as just opening—symbolical, my mother



said, as she placed the pretty gift on my head, of my young life.

Amy Robins declared it was a delicious little morsel ; by which she simply meant it was becoming. That girl had a strange vocabulary ; and Ada said yes ; she really said before them all that it looked like a bridal bonnet.

A rosy flush crimsoned my cheeks, but retreated so quickly, that I felt almost faint.

I do not think any one noticed me ; they were all occupied with the bonnet.

And then Gatty let her quilt fall, and tangled the worsted. I was very glad ; it was so foolish of her to be trying to find out a husband for me.

Such a laughable picture she drew, too, of Dr. Slaffen as bridesman, drawing diagrams to prove my little bonnet was too fairy-like for any such near approach to him. "But you have not found a husband for Annie," Ada said, in her quiet way. "Don't you think Lynn Forrester would look very picturesque in such a situation?"

I did not in the least expect this observation from our gentle, proper Ada, and, from its suddenness, it discomposed me exceedingly, although it was made in the greatest goodnature ; so I carried off my little bonnet,

and placed it, in a great flutter, in my wardrobe. The next day was very fine, and seemed more properly to belong to the aged summer than to the new-born autumn.

I could not at all realize that it was my bridal-morning, yet so it was.

There was a little threatening of rain as I crossed the fields with my mother; and I remember asking her if it did not feel just like a common walk. "And what was it more?" she said, laughing, and looking much better than I had seen her look for some time past.

Lynn had been waiting at our little church with good old Mr. Rodney, our Rector, who was in the secret, and who very much respected and esteemed my mamma.

I am sure he would have kept half a dozen more secrets for her.

Lynn told me, in a gallant sort of way, that I looked prettier than ever that morning. I was glad he said this in a whisper, so that no one else could hear it, for I was beginning to feel strangely nervous, and I was obliged to look stedfastly at my mother, to gain courage, now that we really were in the church.

It was a simple structure: the communion rails were

made of uncarved oaken wood ; and there were high-backed chairs in the aisles for the poor.

Lynn led me to the altar, and again my eyes sought my mother's face. Her smile re-assured me, for a strange sensation had been creeping through my heart, something like a misgiving ; but that bright look of hers put all right again. She never could so cordially sanction what was wrong ; and as to any mistake of judgment on her part, it never occurred to me that there was even the possibility of such a thing.

And yet it was not a pleasure to me to look back on that day. There was shadow somewhere. It may have been on my heart. I may have felt that Lynn was a little discomposed and apprehensive, and this perception may have overshadowed me.

But there was a great deal of vivacity about him that morning, and if his mind was not at rest, I am sure it was not every one who would have discovered it.

As I turned to leave the church with Lynn, a strange feeling came over me, as if I could not stand. My sight was clouded, and my mother said it was faintness, so I leaned my head on the rails, and—I could not help it—I cried bitterly. They gave me a glass of water, and then I was almost myself again.

As we walked home, Lynn said, "Annie, will you

try to love me? I do not like to see you shed those bitter tears on such a day;" on which they began to flow again. My mother looked exceedingly distressed, and said it would break her heart if I grew unhappy; and she told Lynn he must not spoil me, and somehow or other we managed all to laugh, and we reached home as if we had only been out to take a walk.

It was well I had not to meet my father. I do not think I could have looked at him just then. As it was, I found it difficult to return Edith's smile.

Ah, me! I fear I was becoming really unhappy!

## X.

I HAD not been married more than a week, when Ada found me sitting dejectedly in the balcony, my eyes red and swollen from weeping.

I remember she spoke very soothingly, and did not make any inquiries at all as to the cause of my sorrow. She kissed my eyes, and, from a small scent-bottle which she had in her basket, bathed my forehead with eau de Cologne, and spoke of Christ the Comforter, and said there was no sorrow too small to lay before Him.

I did not think *my* sorrow small, but Ada did not

know this, and perhaps we always magnify our own griefs.

"My dearest Annie," she said, "take your burden, whatever it may be, to Him; and the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your heart."

As she spoke, the peculiar expression I have before mentioned as sometimes irradiating her countenance was strong upon her; and there was not, I am sure, so much distance between her and Heaven as there is with others. A kind of elevated simplicity hung as a beautiful spirit-vestment round her, the effect, I suppose, of frequent holy thought.

I know her words were very pleasant to me that evening. She must have felt she soothed me, for she was more unreserved than she had ever before been.

"I always get the Bible," she said, "when my heart is clouded, and some promise, like a ray of sunshine, brightens over me;" and she looked so free and happy as she said this, that I felt I would have given worlds to have changed places with her, and so to have been freed of the dull weight which was resting on my heart.

How long we may have continued to converse I cannot tell, had we not heard steps approaching, and

Edith sprang into my arms, laughing at the intelligence she brought us,—that Miss Bartlett had arrived, and had asked us to give her a bed that night.

## XI.

MISS BARTLETT was one of those who could never remain quietly at home.

She would make friends simply for the purpose of enlarging her visiting connexion, and then she did not derive her pleasure so much from their society as from the shelter their visits afforded her.

She was not over-burdened with any scrupulous delicacy.

For instance, it never occurred to her that the merry group of Elm Hall might sometimes have felt happier without the restraint of her badly-regulated mannerism; it never occurred to her that it was compatible with the greatest hospitality to think that those who remained in a house for weeks should do so only by special invitation. Vanity was an egregious failing of hers, and I believe she had almost persuaded herself that her society was an essential benefit to us all.

She was no longer young: the mirror had told her so in the solitude of her chamber, and the world, by

its desertion, had made to her the same revelation ; but, as my father said, she was not to be blamed for this : she was only to be pitied for battling so with time, for endeavouring to keep up a girlishness of manner, when a grave demeanor would have been so much more becoming.

She might have been lively, and fond of the society of young people, without that affected and mincing sort of manner which made us all think a great deal more of her age than we should otherwise have done ; and then, like too many other unmarried women, she had taken up no particular occupation : she had made a hobby of nothing, so that on this account, more than from any real unkindness of heart, there was mischief, nay, sometimes bitterness, in her profusion of words.

She kindled jealousy in one spirit, clouded another with despondency, and then smiled so pleasantly, you were half inclined to think she had made up her dispute with time.

"Where is Mr. Forrester?" she said, as soon as she had joined us in the balcony. "He has been a month with you, my dear, has he not?" she inquired, turning to me.

I could not help betraying a little confusion, and first I said, "I don't know," and then I added, "Yes, ma'am, I think so." Ada was looking at me kindly, but very

earnestly; it was this that put me out a little. I did not mind Miss Bartlett at all. She had forgotten her very question in her great desire to talk.

"If there were any grown-up Miss Falconers," she said, "I know very well what my thoughts would be: as it is," she continued rapidly, "perhaps the young man has something in anticipation;" and, as she said this, she gave me a pat on the shoulder, and made up a face at Ada.

"Those Forresters," she continued, "are all very hungry people—hungry after gold I mean, my dear," she added, by way of making herself intelligible to my simplicity. "Mr. Lynn's father was very extravagant, and ran through a pretty fortune, which his wife brought him, in no time. Bless you, they had the brokers in the house, and such a scene there was,—Mrs. Forrester fainting, and the children crying—quite novel-like, I assure you," turning to Ada, whose grave look gave her no kind of encouragement.

I felt a passing wish that Carlo might have got loose at that moment, (she was terribly afraid of dogs,) just to have scared her from these dreadful revealings; but nothing of the kind happened, and so she went on:—

"Like a hero of romance, Mr. Forrester received from an old uncle another fortune, which came just in



time to save the tables and chairs. Oh, it was capital ! And that naughty man—that good-for-nothing father—ran through it all again ; and now they are trying to patch up matters by marrying their son to some wealthy maiden.”

Never was scorpion’s sting more venomed than this, her last assertion.

I do not, however, think she meant to wound any one in particular, and she could not possibly have known the amount of uneasiness her random talk would cost me.

All that she had said passed, I am sure, very soon from her mind, for Gatty Henderson joined her at that moment. She plunged into a conversation with her about worsted-work, and talked of amber-satin and goblin tapestry, as if she had left no weight on a young heart which hitherto had been shadowed only by vague and indefinite apprehension.

## XII.

“ BEHOLD how great a matter a little fire kindleth ! ”

Those few words had aroused a storm in my soul. I tried hard to swallow my tears. I pressed my lips rigidly together ; but I was very young, and could not

act like a woman of the world, though, by the by, I am inclined to think she would not have had the feelings to contend with which were struggling in my heart.

I had no strength left me to be calm, so, in my despair, I drew back Ada, and told her I was not well, and asked her to let Gatty and Miss Bartlett go on.

Two things favoured us. In the first place, Miss Bartlett had found a quiet listener; and the twilight—the beautiful purple twilight—fell before us as a veil as we withdrew into one of the deep embrasures of that wide gallery.

What an inexpressible relief it was to me when Miss Bartlett's green flounces fairly turned round the corner!

Slowly I threw my arms round Ada's neck, and sobbed in the first real bitterness of spirit I had ever known.

I looked up very much to Ada. True, she was twenty,—such a woman in comparison to me; but it was not on this account that my mind gave to her a superiority over so many, for Miss Bartlett might have been her mother, so far as years were concerned; but she always gave me the idea of an aged girl,—of one who had faded away without having taken any benefit from time as it passed over her. With Ada it was very different; she was not weary of life. I never knew any

one more capable of enjoying it than she ; but now in her dewy morning she had taken God as her friend, and she went on her way, not gloomily, but gracefully and wisely ; and it seemed to me that there was always strength imparted to one from the very circumstance of being near her.

She always made allowances for the weakness of her fellow creatures, and had nothing of the stoic about her.

She did not think that the heart was to be changed into cast-iron because it was under the influence of religion ; but, like her great Master, she sympathized with tears and sighs ; and now, in her pity and her love, she bent over me, pressed me to her heart, and begged me to be comforted.

Then for some time we were both silent ; but there was a great deal of eloquence in Ada's eyes as she looked on me.

When she did speak, she referred to what she had said before, and every word was fraught with hope.

I tried to smile, and told her how kind it was of her even to allow that a girl so young as I could have any real trouble, for that many would have treated my tears as the result of some imaginary grief.

I owned that I was very much distressed by what

Miss Bartlett had said, for that my mother was very fond of all the Forresters.

I tried to plead this in excuse for the great concern I had shown on this occasion; but, whilst speaking, I felt I was beginning to dissimulate. This caused me to make a full stop and look confused, and Ada ventured on a smile, and said, very delicately and tenderly, "that if I were but a very little older, she should know what to think," and then we separated.

### XIII.

"He has married me for my money, then," I said to myself aloud, as soon as I was alone; and I hurried on to my room in a state of agitation I had never before felt.

Whom should I meet in the passage but Lynn.

How could I hold back from him the dreadful fear which, during the last few minutes, had become almost a certainty to me?

Neither prudence nor consideration, nor even a proper regard for the feelings of others, had much to do with me at that time.

I bade him stop, as I wished to speak to him.

"How peremptory you are, Annie!" he said, and he

looked surprised. "Assuming already on our relationship, I suppose," he added, with just the shadow of a smile.

I was so angry, I could scarcely speak.

"Oh, Lynn," I said in a trembling voice, "how could you deceive me so? You have married me for money. Miss Bartlett says you are all hunting for gold, and that your father is most anxious his sons should provide for themselves by a wealthy marriage; therefore, no doubt he urged you on to take the step you have done for the sake of a few thousands which I suppose you will be able to claim as my husband.

"How could mamma press me on? how could I be so foolish as to marry you?" Passion almost took from me the power of articulation.

"Annie," he exclaimed, taking me by the arm, "what does all this mean? I do not deserve such an accusation. Miss Bartlett's false tongue should never have led you on to speak thus to me."

An expression came up into his face which I had never before seen there. I often thought of it in after years. It was anger, yet sorrow so deep, that his very wrath seemed to become hushed under its influence.

"You are old enough to know," he continued, "the full nature of the charge you have brought against

me, cruel, unjust girl;" and drawing me on,—for he was still holding my arm,—I soon found myself in my mother's room.

I was very childish, not only in appearance, but at heart; and all my anger was melting away before the trembling, timorous feeling which was fast taking possession of me.

I had surely been guilty of great wrong in thus accusing my husband.

What a meaning was in the word! It seemed almost too heavy for my young heart; but if he had married me for money—Oh, if he had; and my perplexity was at its height.

"What is the matter?" said my mother, looking up in surprise from her desk: "Lynn's very lips are white; and you, Annie, tremble like a frightened child."

I could not speak, but Lynn told her what had passed; of my unjust and wicked accusation, and how crushingly it had fallen on his hope of anything like future happiness with me.

I do not, at this distance of time, remember exactly all my dear mother said; but the tone of her voice is yet in my ear; and her look, so pained, so gentle, rises up before me as I write.

It was no common uneasiness that paled her cheeks,

for had she not been, as it were, the cause of our present trouble?

The plan on which she had entered so trustfully and hopefully to secure happiness for me, had it already proved treacherous, and did it stand before her in the character of a real and dangerous sorrow?

How anxiously she looked at Lynn, how sorrowfully at me!

I knew as well then as I knew afterwards—long afterwards—that it drew him from his own trouble; that face of hers, so earnest, yet so sad.

“I am, indeed, grieved beyond measure, Annie, at your intemperance,” said my mother. (I was sitting on the elbow of the old arm-chair, with my forehead pressed against the high cushion at the back.) “I am deeply distressed that you could not act more reasonably than to take anything as sober truth which came from that rash woman’s erring lips.”

Often have we laughed, perhaps too lightly, at her careless slanders, little thinking how heavily her hard words would one day fall on us.

The family to which Miss Bartlett alludes is a Shropshire family, not even distantly related to Lynn.

There was an execution in their house not long ago; but she confused facts; and though she may not alto-

gether wilfully utter a falsehood, I am sure she is not very particular as to the truth of the tale she hears, and would shun the investigation that deprived her of an exciting narrative.

Oh, what had I done? Wrongfully accused my noble, high-minded husband!

I cannot forget how I sunk in my own estimation; how I seemed all at once to become a miserable and guilty being.

I fell on my knees before Lynn, and besought his pardon.

"I am rash and wayward," I said, "but, God helping me, I will never more cause you such sorrow."

Oh! so deeply had I grieved him, that he could not even smile; and, though he raised me from the ground, and told me he freely forgave me, gladness had nothing to do with his voice and manner.

There were tears in his eyes—I well remember that—which could not go away, though they did not fall.

I longed to throw my arms round his neck, and to tell him—for the innocence of girlhood was still resting on me—to tell him that I loved him even then; but he said something to my mother about the sacrifice he felt I had made. He said it coldly, and as if the tie he had formed distressed him; and then my woman's



nature rose up within me. I repressed the pure, warm affection throbbing at my heart, because I fancied I had from my misconduct become hateful to him, and I hurried to my little chamber, no longer an inmate of the fairy land of childhood, but careful and troubled, having, alas, though so young, fairly begun the great battle of life.

## XIV.

AFTER this, Lynn was no longer the same as he had been.

Sometimes, when I endeavoured to enter into conversation with him, he would either abruptly break off, or give all the strength of his remarks to Ada or Gatty Henderson, or even to rosy, dimpled Amy, if she were near. No one observed this, because I was such a child. It was quite natural he should be drawn towards those of more matured thought and advanced mind; but the heavy secret which I still was keeping bravely made me feel these slights very much; and I already looked back to by-gone days, before I knew Lynn, with a feeling of melancholy quite out of place in a girl only fifteen.

I found myself continually calling up old times and

old habits, when I used to listen to my father's winter-evening stories, Oh, so happily ; and when, with my merry companions, we pretended to tell fortunes from the shadows that danced with the fire-light on the wall, dreamers as we were. Who would ever have guessed at mine ? And then, all at once, I felt old in the midst of my girlhood.

Ada asked me, in her kindest manner, what made me so thoughtful. Not at all as if she wished to have the question answered, but only for the purpose of expressing her love and sympathy.

I seemed, in my perplexity, silently to have drawn closer to her than ever.

She was cheerful and bright as the golden blaze which gave such grace and comfort to our evening-room ; and yet a spirituality hung about her, investing her mind with a heavenly garment.

She spoke to me of the warfare of life, as commencing even amidst the mists of morning, and besought me in every difficulty to lean on the strong right arm of God.

That evening, at tea-time, Lynn said, in a careless manner, " I think I shall be going home to-morrow." He did not look towards me as he made this remark, but addressed himself exclusively to my mother, and

then he went on to talk of the snows that had fallen, and said, "they were heavier about our part of the country than his own."

He was not in the drawing-room when I retired to rest, so not even a "good-night" passed between us.

I was very restless that night. I was accustomed to sleep soundly, and it was unusual with me to be wakeful.

It must have been early morning, though it seemed to me like midnight, for the darkness which hung around me, when I started from my troubled sleep, and fancied I saw a shadow against the wall.

"Surely it moves," I said to myself, and I lay listening in the most childish fear; but the old staircase only gave one crack, and then all was still; so that in a little while I came to the conclusion that my troubled fancy had been at work creating its own shadows, and I began to think of my dream.

It was a dream which Ada would have said God had sent to comfort me.

I thought Lynn bent over me in the dark, yet that the spirit-light from within so brightened on his face, as to enable me to see him very plainly.

I thought he said, "God be with you, dearest; may His love rest on you, even though you know it not!"

There was nothing like anger about him; all was

kindness and mercy; and then, even as he spoke, angels came around us, and said in a whisper, but reaching my heart clearly as the loudest tones, "The Lord himself shall be thy keeper."

As I lay there recalling this dream, and lengthening it out, and making the most of it, I heard the sound of carriage-wheels under the window. As I listened, they grew fainter and fainter, and then died away; and I connected this with what Lynn had said at tea-time, and I felt he was gone.

## XV.

Ан! so it was. He was not there the next morning, and my mother had been weeping.

I had become quite familiarized with the idea that my mother was not happy with my father, though I could not remember anything like a quarrel between them; but she did not long for his return, even as I, foolish child that I was, longed for Lynn's.

I knew there was no spirit of unison between them: his sunny looks and bright manner were never reflected by her; that is to say, when she was cheerful, it seemed to have nothing to do with him, and I fancied that, under the influence of her mirth, he grew sad, as if at

such times he heard, more clearly than ever, the murmuring of the river which divided them.

People always held up my mother as a pattern of domestic happiness, but she was truly a woman of a sorrowful spirit. Where the cause of her melancholy lay hidden, I could not tell.

Even during my short life, I had met with many ill-assorted marriages; and if these misunions could be so concealed from the world by the veil of courteous words and smiling looks, what a plenitude of unhappiness might overspread married life!

"And I have darkened *your* life," Lynn, I said to myself, with a sigh, which, from its intensity, I should certainly not have breathed on that fresh and early time of life.

My father returned; but, alas! I could no longer meet him with childhood's innocent face upturned for a kiss. I heard his approach with a beating heart, and it was a struggle to me even to welcome him home with anything like cordiality.

This was the beginning of sorrows.

Everything at our house went on as usual. I never even had a short note from Lynn; but, in answer to my inquiries, my mother said she had heard from him, and that he was going abroad.

She seemed very unwilling to speak about him at all, and it made me unhappy to feel that, by my thoughtless and impetuous conduct, I had forfeited her confidence.

Sometimes Ada, with a smile, passed her hand across my brow, to smooth away, she said, the terrible frown which was gathering there.

I could not even laugh at Dr. Slaffen's diagrams, though he was busy as ever with them under the lamp in the corner. Once he undertook to prove that my face was two inches longer than it used to be, from its expression of gravity. How could I be otherwise than serious, with the burden of my heavy secret upon me?

I am afraid I had learned to fear my father, my good, kind father, who had so cherished his little daughter. The tie I had formed took the nature of positive dishonesty when associated with him; and though invested with my mother's sanction, which seemed the only ray of light resting on the rash deed, it was not on that account deprived of its power to distress me.

## XVI.

TIME passed on, and the winter, which had been a very dreary one to me, in spite of Edith's mirth, and the

glittering boughs which had wreathed our Christmas-rooms, gave tokens of old age.

It was too feeble to resist the resolute approach of spring, which was making the grass green in sunny places, and softening the boughs, and gemming sheltered garden spots with crocuses ; and all this went on so stealthily and quietly, that summer was in its serene and calm maturity before we had thought of acknowledging its arrival.

How that year managed to pass away so rapidly, I cannot tell.

Sunny days we had, which flashed and beamed on us in the full glances of rejoicing nature.

My father was as happy as I ever remembered to have seen him ; but, though moving about amongst us, and very often the life of our youthful parties, he seemed yet to be alone.

Edith was as merry as a bird, and as lovely as an opening lily.

My mother was as lofty and gently feminine as ever, but with a restless wandering of eye not natural to her. This I noticed as the year passed on.

We had our long evenings and merry games in the Dingle. I laughed with Gatty about her books and her worsted-work, and teased Amy about the

everlasting apron-pockets, all the while feeling sick at heart, that I had proved so undeserving of Lynn; shrinking, from a sense of dishonesty, when in company with my father, and, when sitting by my mother's side, yearning and wearying for a return of the old confidence which had given, even to the step I had taken, something like hope and promise.

With Ada only I ventured to be grave and thoughtful, and she gave me her gentle, earnest sympathy. I did not receive it so much from what she said, as from her tenderness of manner towards me.

How humble, and happy, and contented she was—always busy, and yet always at ease!

I was happier when she was with us, and a wish sprung up within me to endeavour to be like her; but I did not then think of the love, and faith, and hope which she had sought and received. I knew how often she resisted temptation, and held fast to the right; but it did not occur to me that it was God's strength in her weakness which enabled her so often to be conqueror; and it was the lack of this knowledge which caused me to fail so often in my resolutions of amendment.



## XVII.

It was changeful, rustling October that placed before me the first anniversary of Lynn's absence.

It would be difficult to describe the precise nature of the sorrow I felt on that day. A great deal of self-accusation was mingled with it, and a wish sprung up within me that I might be some day worthy of my husband.

Discipline had commenced its work in my heart, and I began to feel there was something earnest in life.

I had come out of the fairy-land of girlhood, and I saw perseverance and self-denial in the path before me. Oh, I would take them by the hand ; I would for the future be more womanly and stronger in purpose.

No good ever comes of setting about anything in one's own strength ; but there was a perversity about me at that time which caused me, in my folly, to think slightly of heavenly aid.

Still, however, with all this grave thought was mingled the enthusiasm of early youth. It hung around my serious mood, and beautified it, and was like the fragments of summer which were scattered over the misty autumn.

In my dreams at night, and in my waking visions,

I pictured the day when my husband would return, and, with my demerits and unworthiness, softened by contrition and high resolution, would give me his love.

Though often cast down, my youthful heart was open to hope, and, by turns fearing and trusting, resolving and almost despairing, we passed on into the second winter of my mysterious life.

He was very kind in his approach this time. He did not strew the fields with snow, neither did he make the roads slippery and uncomfortable. Only a clear, bright sunlight traced out the leafless boughs, and Edith and I conjured up an Alpine scene from the frost-work pictures on the window-panes.

Edith used to say, laughingly, that old Jack Frost was a splendid artist, and that he excelled all others, his best performances being in the dark.

Oh, what merry-making we had in the bright and cheerful fire-light of those winter evenings! and when we had a dance, the old room was garlanded with holly.

It was not a ball—nothing of the kind. Such a term for our Christmas gambols would have been very inappropriate.

True, there was a bouquet of sweet young maidens, but all were gathered from our choicest friends.

A few relatives came to us at that time, and Miss

Bartlett found her way to the fire-side. She would take no refusal, though my mother had been very cold to her since the night of her sad mischief-making in the balcony.

Dr. Slaffen always danced with Ada, and I am sure was mentally drawing diagrams on her beautiful face all the while.

When we had shut out the night with the rich damask curtains,—when we had removed the tables and sofas from the old hall,—when the red flame leaped and sparkled, I almost forgot, in the bounding dance, that I had any cause for uneasiness.

One of these evenings I particularly recollect, when some one had slyly put up the misletoe-bough, and we only discovered it by the sudden and energetic embrace which Dr. Slaffen gave Ada.

This made us all laugh so heartily, that we quite forgot our own turn would come next. The young surgeon, who was very thick-looking, gravely kissed Amy Robins as a matter of course, who blushed and laughed, and took it very prettily ; but when my cousin Henry Bernard approached me, with his bright and honest face, I covered mine with both my hands, and entreated him to desist from his purpose.

I was so earnest in my appeal to him, that he rendered

me immediate obedience, and I attracted the attention of all around. It could not be affectation ; I was too frightened for that, too scared, and, besides, my heart was in all I said. Every one looked surprised, and I told Henry Bernard, in my distress, that I was bound by a promise never to kiss any one. Whilst these words were on my lips, Dr. Slaffen sealed them so heartily with an honest kiss, that even my mother, anxious and distressed as she had appeared to be, yielded to an uncontrollable fit of laughter at this exploit.

"What is all this?" my father exclaimed, entering the room, whilst an angry flush rose on his face, and he hastily drew down the unoffending bough.

"I have expressly forbidden this ridiculous practice!" and he fixed his wrathful look so entirely on Dr. Slaffen, that I began to fear even his diagrams would fail to prove him altogether guiltless; but the spirit of mirth that night was too powerful for anything like discord, and the downfall of the misletoe-bough was soon forgotten.

I pressed back my secret deeper than ever into the recesses of my heart, and felt how great was the separation [between me and the light-hearted girls around me.

## XVIII.

ABOUT this time I began to grow very rapidly—so rapidly, indeed, that it excited the notice of every one.

I looked down on Gatty Henderson and Amy Robins, and made a very near approach to Ada.

My mother said I had a most graceful figure, and Dr. Slaffen declared, I was the prettiest girl in all the country round.

I am afraid I felt pleased when he said this; and I wished,—yes, I wished very much,—why need I blush to own it?—that if I really were so much improved, Lynn Forrester could see it.

Then I remembered, with a feeling of disappointment, that it was the doctor's custom to express himself in honied words, and that his compliments were not always to be depended on.

With my mother's praise, however, I could deal differently. I knew that love prompted her admiring words, and that if her estimate of me was too flattering, it was nevertheless sincere.

I think the old understanding existed between us again, for, though seldom, she sometimes spoke of Lynn, and, when she did so, it was pleasantly and calmly, and

she said I should live to thank her for the provision she had made for my happiness; and whilst she spoke, a feeling, which I cannot express, but which, I think, must have been related to hope, sprang up within me; and then I seemed to step out beyond the shadows of my heart. But this lighter mood only lasted whilst my mother was speaking: with the tones of her voice it died away, and my habitual gravity returned and rested on me, defying my happy home and merry companions to remove it.

But a trial was in store for me, which was to bring me into a yet closer communion with sorrow,—a grief, in which, though my father and Edith joined, fell most heavily on me, leaving me to bear the secret at my heart alone.

My mother had been suffering for days from severe head-ache; but as these attacks were by no means unusual with her, we never thought of her indisposition as dangerous.

We always darkened her room at such times, and bathed her temples with vinegar; and Edith and I—for Edith was a quiet little nurse—took it by turns to sit near her, so that we were ready to give her anything she wanted, for the throbbing in her temples rendered it painful for her to move.

This time, however, she was so very ill, that my father became alarmed, and sent off for the doctor, who said it was only a strong nervous affection, closely related to hysteria.

My mother pressed her hands to her temples, and, addressing my father, said, "George, it is something more serious than usual, I assure you ;" but the village doctor smiled complacently, and said that nervous despondency must necessarily be the principal feature of her disorder, and that we must do all in our power to cheer her spirits by talking lightly and pleasantly to her ; and then he buttoned his coat, said something in a careless, easy way about the news of the day, and left the room, looking exceedingly comfortable, and on very good terms with himself.

"George, I am very ill," again said my mother, when the door was shut.

"I will send for a physician, my love," said my father, anxiously bending over her.

Mr. Roberts makes too light of this great suffering.

"Ah, they cannot tell, even the wisest of them," she gently replied.

"I would rather see Mr. Rodney—or stay," she added ;  
"would you pray with me ?"

In another moment he was kneeling at her side,

with his hands over his face ; but I could tell, from the heavy rising of his breast, his deep emotion.

I had never before seen my parents so near in heart as at that moment.

It was a touching and solemn scene,—my father's faltering voice strengthening in the fervency of its prayer for her. My dear mother—her very pain seemed hushed under its influence.

Then she put forth her arms, and drew Edith and me to her bosom, and we could not restrain our sobs.

"You are nervous, my dear love," said my father in his tenderest tone, "and perhaps this excitement will do you harm."

The physician who attended us only on special occasions had by this time arrived, and he re-echoed the opinion, "Great irritation of the nerves." He looked, however, grave and uneasy, and did not treat the matter in that careless way which had so distressed us in Mr. Roberts.

Edith was bending over her, so as to conceal from her view my Father's face.

"Stand back a little ; there, that will do, my darling," she said to her : "let me see your father."

I saw her earnest look, I heard her whispered, faltering words, "George, I am dying." I saw a film steal-



ing over her eyes, a dull, void look, as if the soul was retreating from them ; and so it really was, for, with a long deep sigh, the spirit passed away.

We were all in the utmost dismay,—sorrow-stricken, fear-stricken, and bewildered ; and all the more so, I am inclined to think, because it seemed such an unaccountable thing that any one should die of head-ache.

The servants hurried upstairs, for so sudden had been my mother's death, that it had more the nature of an accident than anything else.

Whilst standing there in my bewilderment, I reflected how she had told me she should die, and then remorse made its harrowing way into my mind.

I wished I had been more gentle and more conciliatory towards her. I reproached myself for having thought she had erred in judgment, and for having been so often chafed and irritated by this persuasion ; and now, as she lay there in the embrace of death, I would have given anything to have recalled the past for a moment, just to tell her how entirely I trusted her, and how I was sure all she had planned for me was right and good.

When my father was composed enough to speak, his first words were those of bitter self-accusation.

“ He should long ago have thought her illness more serious,” he said ; “ and I found there were many feel-

ings twining themselves round our sorrow, far more difficult to bear than the grief itself."

### XIX.

THE stillness hanging round our home had something very solemn in it.

The closed shutters filled our house with a strange twilight, which had nothing to do with the outer world, but seemed born of our woe.

This did not last long. With the opened windows, the merry sunbeams came dancing in, as if there were neither death nor sadness in the world.

At first, I think this was painful to us all, though we never acknowledged it to each other.

There had been a comfort in the gloom. We felt we ought to be dreary now she was gone, and the pleasant spring, which was awaking everywhere, seemed in league with the sunbeams, to set at defiance the shadow of death.

After all, however, time did the most for us, for summer had deepened into full maturity before my father took his morning walks again, before he seemed to feel anything like interest in the improvements and alterations on his large domain.

Our young companions came in and out amongst us as they used to do. We began to count our loss by months instead of weeks. My father always spoke of the dear departed one as "your poor mother;" and it was only when some long silent household world was heedlessly awakened, that Edith and I looked at each other, and felt lonely in the midst of the cheerful faces around us.

And then time, as he ever does, travelled onwards over the months of another year, during which my father seemed to become more closely connected with Edith and me than he had ever yet been.

Though he was calmly happy again, I think there was something more chastened in his manner than before, as if he had discovered how much he had still to learn.

He doubted his own judgment, too, on many points, and there was a humility about him which I thought very touching; so much may sorrow do even for the best of us.

I was becoming quite his companion; and he often told me in a straight-forward way how desolate he felt. But my secret was heavier than ever; indeed, it seemed to have changed its nature altogether since my mother's death, and to have become unmitigated and positive wrong.

Gatty Henderson had her readings in the library whenever my father was out of the way, and she knitted away at her quilt in our large bow-window of the drawing-room as diligently as ever.

Amy Robins was as saucy and as trickful as in old times, always blushing so prettily at her impudence, that it only had the effect of making her seem more gracefully modest than before.

Ada was just as loving and gentle, with the same sweet gravity so instilled into her cheerfulness, that, after all, it was better than the mirth of many; but so unshared, so far down in my bosom was my trouble, that it could take no relief from these my companions. On the contrary, their light-heartedness made me, I am sure, feel only more unhappy.

Dr. Slaffen was often with us, and drew diagrams everywhere—sometimes, as he jokingly said, they were to prove that I was classical in my features; and though my father very much disliked his habit of covering every piece of paper within his reach, I remember on that day he entered into an animated discussion about my appearance, pinching my cheeks, and calling me his heart's-ease, and the sun-ray of his home.

I felt like a traitor as I received all this kindness.

and it was quite a comfort to me to hear him declare that Ada's features were better than mine.

Ada was looking at him as he said this, and she blushed very deeply, and said something about my father having made a great mistake ; and he apologised for having so unceremoniously given expression to his thoughts, though all the while I do not think he seemed very much vexed.

Throughout the summer we had readings under the old trees.

We sat with the west spread out before us like a golden sea, and the arching boughs above us, and the soft green turf under our feet.

The arrangement was a novel one, and very charming to us girls.

My father, too, enjoyed those evenings as much as we did.

He did not deliver a lecture whilst we remained silent, for we continually expressed our opinions, and differed from each other, and from him.

## XX.

TRouble was in store for me, or, rather, that out of which I wrought a trouble ; and it was Miss Bartlett who placed it before me.

Its first character was that of a vague and impalpable fear, and then the fear deepened into certainty, and the certainty was an absolute sorrow to me.

"My dear," she said to me one day, when the sky had become overcast, and the winds were sighing amongst the trees, "has it never occurred to you that, ere long, you must leave your seat at the head of your father's table?"

I did not at first understand her, but, all at once, my thoughts fell on Ada—on Ada, as having won my father's affection. Quick as lightning, the recollection flashed through my mind of my mother's foreboding, and of her earnest desire to shelter me from such usurpation.

The fiery flush mounted to my cheeks. Never had life seemed so bitter to me as at that moment. A sternness, which had hitherto been a stranger to me, seemed to come upon me, and I hastily concluded that both Edith and I were deeply wronged by Ada.

At the same time, I remember that her innocence and goodness rose up before me, pleading for softer judgment; but I would not listen to their voice.

"Ada was deceitful—guilty. What right had she to appropriate to herself any of my father's love?"

"Tush! the seat at the head of the table—what did

I care for that? But the place in his heart, which I so prized, so valued—from that I was to be driven out to admit a stranger!”

The flush on my cheek deepened, and my eye flashed in the indignation I was too proud to express in words.

But Miss Bartlett read my face,—a child might have done that,—and, in the most provokingly cool way, she said, “You need not put yourself in a fit, my dear, for so it will be, and your wisest plan is to give up the chair with a good grace.”

That chair again! What did position at the table signify? But to be oppressed by a step-mother, whose very name I had from a child been taught to consider as synonymous with unkindness—to be thwarted in every wish—to be watched at every turn—of these things what could I do but think bitterly?

A petulant sorrow took possession of me, and, in my vexation, I asked Miss Bartlett if she were to be the happy intruder.

“No, my love,” she said, trying to blush: “I value you and Edith too much to put myself in such a position.”

“*I* never go about after your father as *some* people do, talking of religion and humility, and all that kind of thing, casting down my eyes, or looking up to heaven, as the case may be. *I* never sit simpering and fawning

till I am told I am sweet-tempered, and then sigh, as if it gave me pain to be praised. *I* never spread on flattery like butter to work out my own purposes. Thank God, *I* am straight-forward!" She spoke very rapidly, and, from great excitement, her breath became so short, she was obliged to pause.

All these accusations which she had thrown so violently against Ada—for I well knew who was the object of her anger—had the effect of making me do her justice in my inmost heart, though my distress at the idea of her becoming my father's wife was as great as ever.

If he would marry, he might have chosen one more suited to himself—more staid—more sober. It was so ridiculous to bring a mere girl to us in the character of mother. But as I thus reasoned with myself, my better mind seemed to make answer to angry feelings against my will.

"Is not Ada the very being of all others, it said, calculated to soothe and gladden your father's heart? Do not cheerfulness and gravity meet lovingly together in her spirit, and has she not a temper so sweet, that the cloudiest thoughts would brighten under its gentle influence? Is it any marvel that, from all around, your father has chosen her to place in his heart?"



I could not silence this still small voice ; but I remember wishing very much to be able to think of Ada as false-hearted ; and, in this perverse and wayward mood, I hastened to my young sister, and spread before her Miss Bartlett's surmises.

At first she laughed and tried to cheer me, sending the burning flush to my forehead, by recommending me to find a husband without delay, and thus escape the new domestic arrangement. I contrived, however, to talk of the future in so gloomy a strain, that at length she yielded to the depressing influence of my prognostications, and seemed literally fear-stricken.

She burst into so violent a fit of weeping, that I had much difficulty in restoring her to anything like composure.

## XXI.

Now that I had been set on the watch by Miss Bartlett, I only wondered I had never before observed my father's partiality for Ada. How could I ever have been so blind as to pass it by ?

The very tones of my father's voice, which were always sweet, melted into exquisite softness when addressing her.

He made no effort to conceal his affection, and Ada's

heart was brimful of happiness—so full, that it became tremulous. Laughter and frivolity had nothing to do with her joy ; but I could see it on her changing cheek, in her dewy eye ; I could hear it in the softened tone which gave a spirituality even to common-place words ; and I could feel it in the sweet and tender look with which she met mine, as though she were regarding me through the medium of my father's love.

Yet dreadful was the idea of a step-mother.

Where was Lynn ? Could I but find him, I would leave my father, and claim my husband's home.

Then I remembered how unkindly I had acted towards him, and I came to the conclusion, that he must have forgotten the little country girl, who, in her rudeness and waywardness, had been so repulsive to him ; so there was nothing left for me but submission.

"I have something to tell you, Annie," my father said some few weeks after Miss Bartlett had made her revelation to me ; and he drew my arm under his, and went on with me down the whispering old avenue where the tinting of the leaf had kindled the boughs into living gold.

I remember most vividly that October evening. There were strong shadows cast on the sunny ground by the trees ; and before us a silvery line of fog was tracing the pathway of the valley.

My father's face, though retaining much of its usual serenity of expression, was flushed, and, in an agitated way, he made mention of Ada. He said he was sure I must long ere this have discovered his love for her.

Then he placed all her sweet character before me in a natural and simple way, urged on by his fervent love to speak of her in the highest terms, but only as she deserved.

I seemed to look into his heart as he spoke to me. His high thoughts, his warm affections, his sunny piety, all were revealed to me as he proceeded to tell me of the blessing God had given him in Ada's youthful heart.

I felt what a treasure such love as his must be to her. I felt she was precious to him as the apple of his eye; and yet, with my unyielding prejudices, I stood there, a shadow in his presence, an iceberg on his warm confidence.

No matter what he said in that familiar converse; but I grieved him deeply.

"You and I view things in a very different light, Annie," he said, "and it is more sorrow to me than I can express to find that my children, in this great event of my life, withhold from me their cordial sympathy.

"There is still a great deal in your power, Annie,"

he added, thoughtfully: "we may yet be a happy household, if you will seek to get rid of the unjust ideas which have filled your mind, and replace them by your former estimate of Ada, by the Christian charity which thinketh no evil."

After what had passed, after I had told him that Edith, as well as myself, felt it a great grievance that our friend and playfellow should be set over us as mother, it was no marvel that he spoke but little to us of his intended marriage.

Ada looked paler, and there was just the slightest degree of reproach in her manner. It seemed to say, "I fear you wilfully misunderstand me."

She did not mind my cold reserve, but told me, in a gentle, unaffected way, how honoured she felt by my father's love.

"At first," she said, "I could hardly believe he was in earnest. That he should wish to walk hand in hand through life with one so ignorant and inexperienced as I, seemed impossible; but when he told me of his love,—when he encouraged me to think more highly of myself, to tell him my hopes, and fears, and aspirations,—when he laid his own heart open to me,—and when I knew that we were one in hope and heart—Oh, Annie, I seemed to leave all the shadows of life behind

me, and to go on into an atmosphere of love and hope so sweet, that I trembled at my own happiness."

There was such a grace and truth about her as she spoke, that I could not help looking on her with admiration, aye, and even at that time, strange as it may seem, with affection; but I clung to my wicked prejudice against the position she was about to assume, and thus steeled my heart against her, even whilst I could not resist her gentle influence.

## XXII.

AUTUMN had again deepened into winter when my father left home. There was silence in the harvest-field, cloud on the distant hills, the leafless boughs looked dreary, the air was damp, the winds were cold, the pleasant field-paths were impassable, and it was only at home that there was anything like comfort.

As I looked round the lonely but richly-furnished library, I could not help feeling that I was putting away from me, wilfully and heedlessly, the chance of domestic happiness.

I knew my father would soon return with his bride. I knew it would be in my power to dash with sadness a meeting which should be all sunshine; and still, by some extraordinary infatuation, I cherished, with a sullen

kind of satisfaction, the idea that misery must necessarily follow in the train of a step-mother.

How well I remember Ada's earnest and loving embrace as she crowned our home with her presence ! Equally well do I remember my own rude and repulsive manner, and Edith's angry look ; for she had at this time adapted many of my own misconceptions, my hard and perverted judgments.

As I look back down the stream of time, it seems but as yesterday, that glowing winter evening, when, with the hearth brightly shining, and the chandelier shedding its stars on our table, Ada, in her grave, bright, womanly gentleness, not entirely divested of its girlhood, took her seat at its head.

So diffident, so gentle, so humble she was as she sat there, bending her lovely head in reverence to the blessing about to be asked by my father, that I felt almost constrained at that moment to throw aside my hateful prejudices, and render her my heart's allegiance.

But I paused, and the evil spirit within me gained the victory. I turned from her, though, as I did so, the bitter conviction made way into my mind, that I was throwing from me a heart guileless in its sincerity, affection which was not found every day on the pilgrimage of life.

## XXIII.

How Ada managed to go on so wisely and so well, I could not at the time imagine, though I afterwards learned that she daily sought wisdom from Him who gives, upbraiding not.

She treated Edith and me with a forbearance and sweetness which it is impossible to describe. Although towards me the reserve in her manner deepened, her kindness deepened also, and was sometimes expressed in a kind of pitying gentleness which I could neither evade nor ward off.

I believe she had hours of exquisite enjoyment in my father's society,—hours for which, on bended knee, she thanked the God who gave them. I will not say that she idolized him; her piety restrained her a good deal from such wild devotion; but she looked up to him in that sweet womanly reverence, which, perfect in its love, had nothing to do with fear.

To a youth of her own age, who must necessarily have been immatured in thought, and inexperienced in life, she could never have yielded the same kind of homage.

My father's ripened mind, with its fund of knowledge, its ready information, and judicious counsel, was to

Ada's thrifty spirit in itself a well-spring of happiness ; and then she was so gently playful, so sweetly affectionate, showering on him those little endearments which, from their simplicity, almost wear the nature of childishness.

Thus, my father was lured out of shadow to stand in the sunshine of life.

He sometimes recognised, by a stern look, my irritable and discontented manner ; but, on the whole, he seemed to treat it as a folly, and a weakness rather than as a fault.

I disliked Miss Bartlett most cordially ever since she had testified such evil feeling against Ada ; and now the satirical smile she wore when talking to me, and the cutting remarks she made on my tameness and subserviency, set my heart on fire.

Then Christmas came again with his trappings of laurels and holly, and we had our usual dances and games, and cottage-visittings, and snow ramblings, and our cheerful guests, and jovial evenings.

Yet, all this time, my secret pressed as a load of lead upon my heart.

I tried to get rid of it by forgetfulness ; but when did memory ever leave the heart, but of its own free will ?



Something light as air—a passing jest, a look, a tone—recalled to me my hidden responsibility.

I was a wife, and without the consent of my father. At the very period of life in which innocence and simplicity should attach themselves most closely to us, deceit hung as a mantle around me. I was living under an assumed name, and my very actions were, at times, silently imbued with falsehood.

I think the burden grew heavier when I began to understand something of the sweet unison of spirit between my father and Ada.

There were times when I could have knelt before them, and told them of the sorrow which enthralled me,—of the concealment which had so lowered me in my own estimation; but pride checked this impulse, and the irritability and despondency which, by turns, took possession of me, were attributed by my father altogether to my dislike of the step he had taken.

But Christmas, merry old Christmas, sent laughter to my lips, if it could not send gladness to my heart.

Dr. Slaffen was as busy as ever with his jokes and his diagrams, and one evening made a proposal before us all to Miss Bartlett, which, though it nearly killed us young girls with laughter, and overthrew all my

father's politeness, had well nigh caught the doctor in the net of his own weaving.

I think the only time when Dr. Slaffen seemed to look really in earnest on life, was when he talked of his sons, whom we had never seen, and who were studying on the Continent.

I always fancied the eldest was nearest his father's heart, because he spoke of him as being more talented than his brother—more closely resembling the mother, who had been taken from them in infancy. Oh, if she had lived, who knows but that, under her influence, Dr. Slaffen might have had a deeper and more earnest mind? He might have possessed that something which he now so very much wanted in character; for women, even the quietest and most unassuming, are the very fate, the destiny of man.

This I was beginning to discover, and thus I mused, whilst the laughter which the doctor had kindled amongst us was gradually subsiding.

#### XXIV.

It is a mystery to me, at this moment, how, with goodness all around me, holding, as I did, familiar intercourse with the unsuspecting, the noble-minded,

and the loving,—it is a marvel, I say, how I could maintain in my heart any feelings of coldness and disaffection towards Ada ; but I did so. I thwarted, as much as lay in my power, her little plans and projects. I put trials in her way ; I clouded her path, which, but for me, would have been all sunshine, and gave to recollection a sting which now, though years have passed away, is not wholly destitute of pain.

Louis Beaconsfield, a young Oxonian, who was studying hard for honours at Oxford, came to spend some little time with us at the commencement of the new year.

He was Ada's half-brother, and had a great deal of her spiritual beauty, and that refined expression of countenance which denotes cultivated intellect.

I saw very clearly that Amy Robins was fascinated with him. A certain restlessness and flutter about the little pockets told me this.

She worked him a smoking-cap ; she braided him slippers ; she crocheted him a purse ; she embroidered him braces ; she stitched for him endless markers. Poor little Amy ! and all to no profit.

Destiny was in a very perverse mood at that time. All his kind words and bright glances were mine, unsought, unwished for ; and, before many weeks had

passed, in spite of all I could do to keep him at a distance, to ward off the crisis, he had told me of his love.

I had always thought, and always said, that any girl had it in her power to repress the attention of man ; that she could, at pleasure, invest herself with that calm dignity which would hold him back from the humiliation of a proposal which must be rejected ; but my theory was at fault now.

I had never, either by word or look, encouraged Louis, positively thinking of him too little to avoid him ; and now, when, in intense anxiety, he told me his heart's history, when, in the ardour and sincerity of youth, he laid before me his hitherto restrained emotions, my heart recoiled from the revelation, and I begged him to say no more as I did not—I could not love him.

I am afraid I spoke very abruptly, but I was not calm then as I was afterwards when I thought of an interview.

To listen for a moment to such words as his, was, in my situation, positive sin, for he spoke fervently, and as if the subject were the one momentous consideration of his life.

Louis was not vain ; he lived too much out of self for that ; but, simply from want of reflection, he had

never anticipated a refusal from me ; and the wisest of us are prone to believe what we desire.

He did not turn away from me, as one with less noble feeling would have done, ashamed of the rejection, but he stood gazing at me with a face expressive of bewilderment, blended with the tenderest love.

Then suddenly a look of despondency, such as I can never forget, fell as a dark shadow on him, as if the one dear hope, freighted with all the treasures of his soul, were shipwrecked—lost.

But I will reveal no more of our intercourse that day. Suffice it to say, that, in my pity for his sorrow, I endeavoured to soften my unloving words, by telling him I was engaged.

It was very thoughtless of me to do this, but we cannot always set prudence as a seal on our lips ; and with the same expression of tenderness and sadness on his face, with which resentment had nothing to do, he turned from me, and I stood listening to his steps as he crossed the hall, and went slowly up the old staircase to his bedroom, thinking that, young as I was, this was the second time, though now without any fault on my part, I had grievously afflicted a faithful human heart.

Ada's voice aroused me from my reverie, and she

laughed gently at the position in which she found me standing like a statue, she said.

She went on with me into the library, which was all softened and hushed by night, for the lamps were not yet lighted, and the gently-flickering flame was mysteriously, yet cheerfully, sporting with the curtain. And she soothed and comforted me, as she always did, whenever I would allow her to do so.

I did not deserve her kindness, but my tears flowed freely, and this was a relief to me.

If she knew the secret vows which were upon me, she would never have blamed me for rejecting her brother ; but as I could not reveal to her the one, neither would I tell her the other.

It was enough for her to see I was distressed ; her sympathy was unbounded.

By degrees she gained courage to speak to me of herself, of her own happy but peculiar situation ; and yet so blended was all she said with concern, not for herself, but for us, that it was entirely divested of the character of selfishness.

## XXV.

"LISTEN to me for a few minutes," she said, in a more earnest way than that in which she had lately addressed me.

"When I promised to be your father's bride, it never occurred to me that I should miss your welcome home. When he first told me of his love, Annie, and made me feel that I was not unworthy of companionship with him, I was heedless enough to imagine that, by this very belief, I was admitted into a sisterly companionship with you.

"This dream was soon dissolved by your sudden change from lively affection to coldness and reserve; but at that time," she continued, with a guileless and gentle blush suffusing her whole face, "my hopes, my heart, my life, were not in my own keeping. So precious was your father's love to me, that I could not have put it from me; even though by holding it fast, I knew I was strengthening your feelings of dislike against me.

"I have never, to the best of my knowledge, by word or action, wronged you, Annie. Privately, in my own heart, I have dealt gently with your prejudices, and thought leniently of your estranged and altered manner.

"You have not been able to rise above the general feeling of recoil from a step-mother; and, because the sacred trust of your father's heart has been committed to my charge, you will not accept from me a sister's love."

Her words had the tone of a gentle remonstrance, and there was something pure and spiritual about her as she rose up and stood before me, half in entreaty, and half under the influence of a delicate restraint.

I thought she looked like an angel of mercy. All the love of by-gone days floated over my spirit as I gazed at her ; but alas, alas ! I let it pass, and made some careless reply, which sent tears to her eyes and trembling to her lips.

At length she said, " Well, Annie, as you will not let us be as formerly, I must try and be content. I still hope, and often look forward to the day when the dear old home-happiness will be ours again." She could not trust herself to go on, so she looked down, and I knew she was struggling with her tears.

I could scarcely resist her bright and softening influence. I felt that in another moment I should betray the better feeling within me, so I hastily left the room, with self-accusation at work within me, almost as hard to bear as my great secret.

Louis' proposal had upset me very much, and I could not all at once be myself again.

I was uneasy at having told him I was engaged ; and though it was a relief to me when I found he did not make his appearance at the supper table, yet I grew



vaguely apprehensive of some new trouble arising out of my imprudence.

At night I thought of Ada's counsel: she had told me to ask God for strength and patience.

I hope it was neither romance nor enthusiasm on my part; but as I knelt and prayed, a sense of mercy seemed to be wafted to me from the land which is very far off.

I thought of what I had heard my father saying only a few days before,—that great were the blessings which prayer drew down from heaven; and with a more hopeful view of the future, and more genuine good will to man, than had for some time been my portion, I fell asleep.

## XXVI.

How tranquilly happy Ada was! Her heart, illuminated by its pure and fervent love, shed brightness on her path, which remained undimmed even amidst the chills of my discontent and unkindness.

My father had lost all his reserve of manner. His spirits were not fluctuating as formerly. There was an equability of happiness about him, which shed a composure over his appearance. It seemed to me as if he

had received a new nature ; certainly, his morbid melancholy had melted away under the influence of Ada's love.

I knew this was the talisman he carried about with him. If he had any saddening memories, the beautiful young tendrils of her affection did not so much conceal them, as impart to them a pleasant and softened character.

It was strange, but I always had a fancy to measure time by Lynn Forrester's departure. It was now five years and more since he had left us, and I was nearly twenty. Sometimes I longed to ask my father if he knew where he was ; but conscience made a coward of me, and I had not courage for the inquiry.

Our house was full of visitors. It was the summer time. There was a murmur of merry voices in the drawing-room : some were singing, and others were in that state of happy feeling which, amongst the youthful, overflows in melodious laughter.

I was in the upper balcony, looking out on the green fields, on the full foliage of the trees, some of which were waving their boughs in the golden rays of sunset, whilst others were darkening in the melancholy beauty of the rich twilight. Suddenly, Ada stood before me, and, with a very bright smile, offered me a package of love for my thoughts.

"You shall have them," I replied. "I was at that moment regretting that Mr. and Mrs. Masterman were among our guests."

"And why?" she inquired. "They are old, and fond of talking; but they have carried cordiality of heart and gentleness with them through many changing scenes."

"True," I said; "but one does not think of these things when Mrs. Masterman is so eternally dwelling on her sad reverses."

"With every one," Ada replied, "there is something to bear; there is need of patience in all familiar intercourse; and if we kept this more continually in mind, perhaps many of those trifles which now break the chain of friendship, or, at all events, entangle it, would lose their discomposing power."

"I often think," she continued, leaning over the balustrade, and looking very thoughtful, "how delicate, yet how important, are the shades of difference with which we should treat every separate human heart. Some we may hold at once in the strong grasp of our love; from others we must stand back, not because they have not won our sympathies or made way into our hearts, but simply lest a nearer approach to them might be considered intrusive, or, what is worse, hypocritical;"

and she turned on me a look, at once so earnest and so fervent, that I could not but recognise she was alluding to our own position with regard to each other. Then, throwing off the momentary gravity which had rested upon her, she grew calm, serene, and cheerful as ever.

"What an episode I have delivered," she said, "on Mrs. Masterman's arrival;" and taking my hand in her old girlish way, as if she were Ada of the Dingle and the meadow again, she led me into the drawing-room, and, gracefully presenting me to the new comers, passed on to her other guests.

## XXVII.

AND there sat Mrs. Masterman in her shining *glassé* silk of silvery grey, rivalled only by the locks which crowned them.

She had been very handsome. There was a brilliancy in her eyes, a flexible tone in her voice, and a gentle cordiality pervading her manner, which seemed to have nothing whatever to do with the age which was resting so gracefully about her.

The garrulity of which I have before spoken was soon pouring its full tide over me.

For a long time she dwelt on her sad reverses of for-

tune ; and, as if the very cadence of that expression had a peculiar charm for her, she wove it into almost every sentence, arranging her chronology by it ; telling you of every trivial event as happening either before or after her " sad reverses ;" but her smile never dimmed the while, neither did her manner grow less cheerful.

My father, who was not given to joking, passed me with a smile, whispering, as he did so, " Fairly caught, I see, by ' sad reverses.'"

But the old lady, though constantly repeating these words, by no means made them the subject matter of her conversation.

Sometimes they seemed mere expletives, uttered unconsciously from long habit ; at other times, in some incomprehensible way, they became invested with a power of expressing sympathy for others ; and so she went on, binding her " sad reverses" round every subject, and yet convincing you, as she did so, that disappointment had thrown no cold shadows on her heart, which was ever ministering to the suffering around her.

By degrees her conversation with me assumed a more earnest tone.

I was in better spirits than she had expected I would be, she said. She lost her reticule, and then found it again, only to look for her gloves ; then she lost her pocket-

handkerchief, and a careless observer might have supposed she was searching for it in Ada's eyes or mine, so acutely did she look from one of us to the other.

Ada was talking to a gentleman, unconscious of the glances bent on her, with the crimson curtain light falling on her high brow. She was speaking to him in that low, clear, pleasant voice, which seemed to have been gently modulated to her heart's daily happiness.

I never remember to have seen him amongst us before. I had only time to think him rather handsome and *distingué* looking; for my father, joining the group, concealed the stranger from me.

Perhaps it was well that he did so at that moment, otherwise I might possibly, in my curiosity about the unknown visitor, have neglected to pay that attention to the lady of "sad reverses" which politeness requires.

"Here is your pocket-handkerchief, ma'am," I said. In truth, it had only slipped from her hand, and lay just before her on the sofa. She spoke of the trials of life, and of the thorns in our daily path, dwelling a great deal on the every-day petty annoyances which were so discomposing; and she looked towards Ada as she said this, and I knew very well she referred to her presence in our home. Then she spoke of my goodness and gentleness of character, which she said had been called out by trial.

She seemed very well satisfied with the effect of her speech, which raised a burning blush on my cheek and brow.

How could she, poor soul, in her simplicity, tell that it was kindled by shame and self-reproach? How could I dare to take that goodness as my own portion which belonged to Ada, gentle, forbearing Ada?

"We all feel for you and Edith," the old lady said, forgetting, in her excitement and sympathy, even her "sad reverses;" yet, as if unable to give full expression to her feelings without its aid, she added most warmly, "Mr. Masterman and I would have asked you long ere this to have spent some weeks, months, with us, had not our 'sad reverses,' rendered such a thing impossible."

The small voice within, which is generally, nay, always faithful, told me then, as I sat there, of Ada's innocence and goodness, of her spirit of love, which, noiselessly pervading our household, purified by forbearance, and pre-eminently hoping all things, gave a colour and an influence to our lives which should have called forth, at all events, from my heart, answering love and gratitude.

## XXVIII.

AGAIN I had a glimpse of the stranger. He was in conversation with my father. There was a reserve about him, which at first I fancied was pride; but thought and intellect were expressed on his face, and an indefinable grace of manner hung around him, which could not fail to be attractive; for a courteous bearing often gains more consideration than sterling good qualities.

On pretence of going after my knitting, which lay on a small walnut work-table near the window, I drew towards the group in conversation.

I often thought of this afterwards,—I, who, from the circumstances in which I was placed, so shrunk from gentlemen, what strong curiosity came over me, that I so very much desired to have a nearer view of this stranger?

My father was speaking with unusual animation, and then this unknown guest remarked that disappointment seemed to lie in wait for us at every turn, taking the zest from enjoyment, or, at all events, mixing alloy with the happiness it could not entirely overcome.

Then Ada said, very modestly and prettily, and look-



ing all the while at her husband, "That she thought this was a needful part of life's discipline; and yet," she added, with a merry smile brightening over her face, "it is not every hope that disappointment has the power to dim: some enjoyments are left to us free from its dark shadow;" and such a bright interchange of looks passed between her and my father, that I knew very well what she meant, and I thought their new acquaintance seemed to understand them too; for he said to Ada, as plainly as looks could say, "How pleasant in this hollow world to cast anchor on such love as yours!"

I was watching all this very quietly from my corner by the walnut table, but at that moment I dropped my reel of silk, and my dress rustled so as I stooped to find it, that my father looked round.

With a pleasant smile on his face, he introduced the stranger to me as Mr. Warren, who immediately set to work to find the lost skein.

This employment he continued with so much assiduity, that I lost sight of his face again, and for some time I could only see the masses of his jet black hair, which fell like night over his temples.

At length he rose, and delivered it gracefully to me; and then I observed the embarrassment which had

attracted my attention, even whilst I stood at the other end of the room.

Strange as it may seem, this did not in the least take from his manliness ; it only gave to his manner an originality, which to me was perfectly fascinating, and I could see that Ada was better pleased with him than she generally was with people at first sight.

He said some common-place things to me, not unmixed with compliment, and this surprised me ; for I had concluded, from a certain inexpressible something in his manner, that, though extremely well bred, he had not much to do with the flatteries of speech.

I fancied that he seemed better qualified to discuss grave subjects with my father, than to be complimenting a young girl on — ; but no matter.

Never is our judgment so much at fault as when we let its decision be influenced in any way by appearance ; and a man may look grave whilst bright summer thoughts are in his heart, just as readily as he may smile when oppressed by sorrow.

Afterwards, when Edith joined us, Mr. Warren entered into easy and pleasant conversation with her. I was not at all surprised at this, for, indeed, she was a sweet girl, though some people said she was affected ; and I think she was just a very little too fond of flirting.

On this occasion, however, she was unusually quiet, answering Mr. Warren diffidently, and with grave propriety. She told me afterwards, she found it impossible to talk nonsense to him, in spite of herself.

## XXIX.

I AM afraid that, in the depths of my heart, I began to feel some regret that Mr. Warren took so little notice of me.

I was sorry for this feeling, because it had long been a point of conscience with me to subdue in my heart all love of approbation that did not come from my father or sister, and a disappointed sigh sometimes escaped from me when I observed that all Mr. Warren's kindest words and most cordial looks were given only to Edith and Ada.

I was, I can remember, extremely dissatisfied with myself when I discovered the state of my mind. I grieved very much in secret at the wrong I had done Lynn in thus cherishing a desire for attention or notice, and I struggled against this feeling, and strove hard to repress it.

Mr. Warren was certainly very much charmed with my father paying to him the most cordial and respectful

attention ; and it could not be wrong to feel a pleasure—a pride in this.

My dear father was much altered, and I must say improved ; though this expression may seem out of place for me, as I had never known him anything but wise and kind ; but every one in the neighbourhood spoke of him as having undergone a great change.

You could see that happy thoughts had crept into his mind, and settled there amidst all his deeper knowledge.

You could see how busy he sometimes was with light projects for Ada's happiness ; and how completely and pleasantly she occupied his mind, he let out in a thousand ways, sometimes making me laugh, and at other times sending through my heart such a pang of sorrow, that I could only weep.

The idea of my bondage troubled me ; and yet it was not precisely the idea itself which fretted me : it was, perhaps, the consideration that, by these fetters, I was debarred from any chance of that kind of happiness which I saw existing between my father and Ada.

It was no unmaidenly and indecorous wish to come forward in the character of wife which occupied me ; but I felt I had, by a most foolish act in childhood,

laid out a desolate future for myself, over which I had neither power nor control.

I made no scruple now to hold, as a conviction, that which, in early youth, it had given me sorrow to indulge, even as a passing thought.

I considered that my dear mother's judgment had been greatly at fault when she looked on my marriage as security for my future happiness.

Even now it is pain to me to remember that time; and the worst of all was, that these repining and discontented feelings began, in some mysterious way, to connect themselves with Mr. Warren.

I became increasingly fluttered and uneasy when he made Edith the sole object of his attention, though, whenever he addressed a common observation to me, which he sometimes did, I lost my self-possession,—said just the very thing I did not wish to say, and then grew angry with myself for my want of common sense.

Sometimes I thought he resembled Lynn Forrester. This was a dangerous fancy to take possession of me, because I often pleaded it in excuse for the many thoughts which I now gave to him; but Edith saw this likeness as well as I, so that it could not have been imagination only.

By degrees I lost much of my turmoil of manner when in Mr. Warren's company.

I had long felt those evenings the pleasantest when he was with us. How we chatted together, Edith, I, and Mr. Warren ! and when my father joined our little circle, it only increased our enjoyment ; for then deeper subjects made way into our converse, and Mr. Warren had a play of fancy, and sometimes a beauty of thought, which it was impossible not to appreciate. He had a peculiar way, too, of drawing out my father's knowledge with very few words on his part ; and though Edith and I were very often only listeners, we scarcely felt that we were silent, so great a part did we seem to bear in the animation of those happy conversations.

For my part, I could have remained there for ever.

I received many new thoughts, and had, I am sure, born within me many higher purposes, as I sat rapt in attention there ; for though, from childhood, my father's cultivated mind had freely given to me of its store, I had never been imbued, as I now was, with a love of knowledge, with a wish to be something more than I felt myself to be,—an ignorant girl. How swiftly those evening hours passed !

Father Time must have put aside his scythe, that he might run the more quickly.

"Supper! supper!" and though Ada breathed it in her softest tone, it was at that time an unwelcome sound to me, as that announcement always set the seal on our communings, at all events, till the following evening.

## XXX.

AH! the worst time of all was come now.

I had had attentions paid me at which I trembled, and words of love breathed to me, from which I turned in affright.

Now, though I was almost afraid to own it to myself, I was traitor to my duty, and to my principles; for I had admitted Mr. Warren's image into my thoughts, though I sometimes tried to persuade myself that he had not made an impression on my heart.

I was more distant than I should have been to him under other circumstances, caring only not to seem to avoid him; for this, I well knew, might have been taken as a proof of regard. But no matter: his influence over me was as a spell.

I treasured his words as gems; I prized his looks as light.

I, who standing face to face as it were with God, had promised to love another, and that other only!

Perjured, false as I considered I was, and often turning from myself in scorn, I could not tear out the feeling which had taken such deep root within me, neither did it grow weaker from the painful thought in which it was enveloped.

But it must not be supposed I had given my heart to a man who stood up in cold reserve against me.

Things had very much changed of late ; and from those delicate tones of admiration which, bestowed sparingly, are valued all the more when they do come, Mr. Warren proceeded to words of kindness—of love.

It was not at all his way to talk nonsense, and he treated even this subject in a manner of his own, taking such a high, grave view of the matter, solemnizing it so by his earnestness, that I had not power to tell him it was wrong in me to listen for a moment to his words.

I might have brought forward my engagement as a plea for turning from him, as I had done when Louis Beaconsfield proposed to me ; but, in his high-mindedness, I knew he would at once have turned from me, and I should then never more have heard those words of love.

The Scripture truly says, "The heart is desperately wicked." Mine must have been at that time, otherwise



how could I have cherished feelings which were palpable and unmitigated sin, and almost have felt pleasure in so doing ?

## XXXI.

"THE woman who deliberates is lost;" and most certainly I lost much of my moral courage by parleying with conscience, by using sophistry instead of argument, till I had no battle with myself, but received Mr. Warren's fervent attentions under the name of friendship.

Arabella Smedley came at this time to spend a few weeks with us. She was the daughter of an old friend of my mother's, and I think it was solely on this account that the acquaintance between our families was kept up; for Arabella was not a favourite of my father's, neither could Edith and I associate with her, though, when very young, I had to a certain extent looked up to her for what I thought her superior knowledge of the world, and her acquaintance with the twistings and turnings of the fashions and etiquettes of London life; but this reverence for her worldly wisdom had left me now.

On the very first evening after her arrival, she told me she considered a great deal of attention from gentlemen

her due, and that it would be her own want of tact if any man often passed her by without notice.

From the way in which she spoke of the Hon. Mr. Carlton, I thought she was engaged to him.

How she laughed at what she called my simplicity, when I announced this to her!

"Why, child," she said, in a patronising manner, addressing me as if she were many years my senior, though, in truth, we were nearly of the same age, "why, child, if you knew a little more of life, you would soon find that a stylish and fashionable girl"—and she drew herself up with a great look of satisfaction as she said this—"does not always give her brightest looks and smiles to the man whom from circumstances she may be compelled to marry;" and her words grew slow, and she lisped as she continued, "Mr. Carlton is a great admirer of mine, foolish man! He cannot be at rest—without—me. He contrived to meet me everywhere till Ma said he was a bore, a penniless, younger son, with plenty of conceit and foppery.

"But I did not agree with Ma," she added, her drawl increasing to painfulness. "I thought it very agreeable to receive his compliments, though I used to chide him all the while for his insufferable stupidity in saying such things to me.

"But why was there need of any disguise, Arabella?" I inquired. "Could you not have told your mother of your love, and she would have consented in time to your marriage?"

"Oh, you insufferable little goose," she exclaimed, you unsophisticated country damsel. Was there *ever* such a genuine creature?" and she patted my cheeks, and her style and tone were such as we use to a very little child. "My sweet simplicity," she continued, "how could I marry Mr. Carlton? What establishment had he to offer? But the attention of certain *distinguished* persons is a passport into good society."

"A girl takes her position from her associates."

"It was no matter that I thought a passport, obtained through a flirtation so systematically heartless, would be dishonestly possessed, and that you would enter a kind of moral swindler into the evening party; it was no matter, because Miss Smedley would have thought any observation of this kind from me the result of my home-staying and ignorance.

"It was through Mr. Carlton's family," she continued, "that we were introduced to the Fenhams, and they are immensely well off, and he was as jealous as possible, because Mr. Augustus Fenham joined our party at the Flower Show.

"Oh, it was such fun!"

I thought her eloquence increased amazingly as she rattled on about her own attractions; and though I was, in truth, a simple country girl, I had, through my father, who had at one time moved a great deal in high life, been always impressed with the idea, that there was a lack of good breeding in making self the prominent subject of one's discourse.

I felt convinced of this now, when I vainly tried to throw Arabella Smedley into another line of conversation. She always flew back, with the rapidity of lightning, to the one dear topic of her own attractions.

"Though Mr. Carlton's eyes were too bright," she said with a simper, "for me to view him exactly in the light of a bore, I must own, I always thought him in the way when Lord Tatterton was present.

"Sometimes, just as I had got into a pleasant conversation with his Lordship, or rather," she added, with a strange, "ha, ha," intended for a laugh, and yet altogether untuned to gladness, "rather, just as a flirtation was established between us, Mr. Carlton was sure to interrupt us, either claiming my hand for the next dance, or joining us in our discussion or merry-making, as the case might be.

"Was not this provoking, Annie?" she continued,

with such a lisp, that verily I could scarcely understand her.

“Ma says Lord Tatterton would have proposed long ago, but for him. Stupid creature! I cannot help it. They do come after me so, and Ma says I’m just the girl for gentlemen.”

## XXXII.

ONE evening, in particular, I remember, when she had assumed a languid air, I am inclined to fancy by way of being imposing,—for I think she began to suspect I was not always interested in her conversation,—she put on so very *exhausted* a manner, that I proposed she should lie on the sofa.

“No, thank you,” she said; “I am not fatigued *now*, though, if your father begins to philosophize this evening, as he did with Mr. Warren last night, I shall be prodigiously wearied, I assure you. The very recollection of it makes me yawn.”

Again, I was much staggered at my own estimate of fashionable manners. Here was Miss Smedley, who had for some five seasons been going the round of fashionable life, taking no pains to suppress a yawn, as demonstrative of her weariness of all around her; a yawn, for which

my father, when I was a little child, would have sent me to bed.

But then I reflected I must keep in mind, that Miss Smedley was now in the country with unsophisticated girls, who knew nothing of the low estimate formed of their tastes by those who moved in the halls of gaiety.

It was quite necessary that she should express to me, in some forcible manner, how she wearied of the monotony of our home, otherwise I might have accused her of bad taste; and it is quite possible I might have fancied she thought there was nothing so very unpleasant in our bright social evenings,—those evenings to which I looked forward throughout the day with thrilling anticipations of enjoyment,—those evenings which, after the lapse of many years, hold a softened, but very secure, place in the storehouse of my memory.

“But did you feel no interest in Papa’s discussion last night?” I inquired, taking no notice whatever of the prolonged yawn which had so surprised me.

At this time she was leaning back on the sofa pillow, with her eyes fast closed.

“Interest!” she exclaimed, in a tone so supercilious, that the flush of vexation rose to my cheeks, and she

curled her lip till she brought incipient wrinkles round it. "What was there to be *interested* about?"

I wondered at her lack of real refinement. Our cook, a good faithful creature, of the humblest birth, would not for the world have spoken slightly of anything in which I was interested, even when out of my hearing amongst her companions; and associating, as I knew Arabella did, with many who were noble-minded, I must say I marvelled she could thus heedlessly disparage those whom she was well aware I so valued.

My father had often talked to me of the heartlessness of many of the nobility, but it seemed to me, to use a common-place expression, as if Arabella had extracted the rubbish only from the heap.

She could move and dress in a fashionable style, and speak of those high in rank as her familiar friends; but, after all, you could see she was an imitator: if at any time she had possessed genuine good qualities, they were all thrown aside, forgotten, in her great desire to be a successful copyist.

It struck me, however, that she did not succeed, that she did not successfully imitate the old masters.

She used high-sounding words, and had a peculiar sort of phraseology, very much in vogue a short time ago amongst the hangers-on of the upper classes.

If she read a little tale, it was "splendid, fascinating;" or if anything discomposed her in the least, it was "monstrously annoying."

A little fly once unwittingly made its way into her teacup. "O, Annie!" she exclaimed, "take it away! take it away! The stupendous creature!"

I did not mind all this; I only laughed in secret at it with Edith; but I could not so easily brook her utter disregard of the feelings of others.

What need had she to tell me that our evenings were stupid and spiritless?

This not only implied that Mr. Warren was a tiresome man, but it included my father, who conversed so fluently and well, in the list of the monotonous.

It was quite too bad, and I was chafed and fretted at her remarks.

But not even the shadow of real sorrow had as yet fallen on her way; and as I thought of this, I remembered what Ada had said to me a few days before,—that affliction had a wonderful power in softening our asperities, and in rubbing off the selfishness which gathers on the spirit from a course of unmitigated prosperity.

I scarcely thought of her words at the time she uttered them; but, as I contemplated Miss Smedley's



character, they seemed invested with sudden truth and strength. "A word spoken in due season, how good is it!"

My father, I knew, had been tried, though the peculiar nature of his sorrow I did not learn till some years after this time.

And Ada, our sweet Ada, was I not carrying out the needful discipline for her by my still wayward and irritating behaviour towards her on many occasions?

I must have been musing for a long time, for Miss Smedley was sleeping, and I became convinced of this—let Fashion turn aside with a blush, by a distinct and abrupt *snore*, which, from its own violence, aroused the sleeper.

### XXXIII.

SHE hastily arose, and began to skip about the room, saying, "What a charming ball, Annie, might be given at this grave old place; and I would lead it off with your father," she continued, attitudinizing as she spoke, in a manner which I thought both stiff and awkward.

Then she burst into a violent fit of laughter at the comic nature of the picture she had placed before her

mind, at the thought of her airy and fashionable appearance, in contrast with a plain country gentleman.

For all her airs and grimaces, I could not help thinking, as she stood there, that the contrast might not have been altogether in her favour; for there was a nobleness on my father's high brow, which rested there as a beauty and a grace, but she could not admit the idea of anything attractive in homely country people like ourselves, who had neither Earls nor Honourables visiting us at that time.

"But, Miss Smedley," I said, as soon as she was composed enough to listen to me, "I should soon be weary of such stormy mirth.

"It is true, that, when Harry Bernard is with us, our old house, from one end to the other, resounds with laughter; but I am not half so truly happy as when spending quiet evenings with my father and Mr. Warren. The very hours you complain of are the sweetest in the whole day to me."

"Because you are in love, little puss," she said, tapping me on the cheek; and an unwelcome sense of the truth of her words took possession of me.

She had laid to my charge a heavy crime, though she knew it not, and I grew moody, absent, and depressed.

Miss Smedley seemed to become more painfully frivolous every moment ; and whereas, at first, it had amused me, I now thought her vanity despicable, her self-importance contemptible.

What did I care for her presentation ?

Never had I thought more hardly of her than I did when, sitting droopingly with her scent-bottle at her nose, she proceeded to tell me how Lord Tatterton had declared that she outshone Lady Mary and Lady Jessie Ray in gracefulness of manners and real symmetry of form.

"Ma had said, if she played her cards well, she might yet be a Countess ;" and then, to crown the whole, ere the words had fairly died on her lips, she told me she was engaged in marriage to a wealthy merchant, Mr. Patterson by name.

"Oh, the interested dealings and hollow ways of this false world !" I mentally exclaimed, giving utterance only to some slight expression of astonishment.

How heartless, how wicked she appeared, as she sat there wondering at the wonder she had awakened in me !

It seemed to me that she might have gone on so happily, but she was coaxing trouble to come to her ; for, truly, she was laying up a store of sorrow for herself by her unprincipled way of proceeding.

"You amaze and surprise me, Arabella," I cried. "How can you be endeavouring to win Lord Tatterton's affection, when you are bound by a sacred promise to another?"

It was, perhaps, not from me that this rebuke should have come, but I could not help it.

I was bound deeply, sacredly, and yet to my secret heart had I not admitted a stranger? But then not willingly. Oh, no! not willingly.

"You are a harmless piece of unsophistication, Annie," Miss Smedley replied, "with the dews of innocence hanging round you in this unworldly retreat." This was said satirically, and therefore lost much of its bitterness to me. "But, thank Heaven, I am not high-minded enough to throw rank and wealth overboard for the sake of a foolish promise. Why, Miss Simplicity, they are made but to be broken in such matters. But what annoys me is, some one has told his Lordship that I am engaged. Ma says, she is certain it was Lady Jessy, who is mad to have him as her husband; but she shan't, if I can help it. Oh, you don't know how triumphantly I meet Lady Jessy's angry glances when I am leaning on his Lordship's arm."

"That is a useless kind of victory," I replied; "and I must say, I prefer my peaceful home, without its

plans and artifices, to a routine of life which, to me, would be heartless and insipid.

## XXXIV.

I DID not, in my impetuosity, make any allowances for Miss Smedley. I did not consider how she had been influenced by the style of life she had so long led ; neither did I remember that a mother's earnest prayers had never gone before her in life, sanctifying the path as yet untried by her child.

"It is all very fine of you," Miss Smedley said, losing her temper, and her languid manner with it, "to talk of principle and honour, and all that kind of thing, and to speak uncharitably of your friends, because they cannot, like you, understand the felicity of sitting at a square mahogany table, talking, perhaps, of the internal policy of China, or the latest fashion amongst the Kamskatschans : you may admire all this, if you please, and fancy, in your wisdom, that you are entertaining your guests ; but I give you fair warning, that, if we are to have a repetition of last night, I shall sleep the while ;" and she flounced, and turned about, and grew very red in the face, and then took to fondling her pet dog, appearing to be

so entirely engrossed by it, as to forget I was in the room.

“Are these the manners of fashionable life?” I thought.

I had always heard that very worldly people managed to conceal dexterously their ruffled feelings.

It was not want of skill that made her thus transgress the rules of politeness. Simple as she thought me, I knew well enough, that, if Lord Tatterton could only have made his appearance, she would have been all gentleness and smiles.

Oh, I had a pretty shrewd suspicion of the real state of the case.

I knew Miss Smedley did not care to keep up any disguise with one so uninitiated in the ways of the world as I, and therefore she had given me an insight into her character.

I believe it was of use to me, in causing me to feel more than ever the shallowness of the world's friendship, and the insecurity of resting our hopes on it.

It made me think seriously of the meaning of those words, “Put not your trust in any son of man;” and this signified, my father said, that kind of unbroken trust which should be given to God alone.

## XXXV.

To my surprise, Miss Smedley was much more talkative than usual that evening, and all her conversation was directed to Mr. Warren.

Perhaps my heart beat a *little* quicker than usual as she chatted on, and Edith brought a flush to my cheeks, by telling me that I was deliberately winding the worsted round my ivory card-case.

At another time she burst into a most unceremonious and unaristocratical fit of laughter, appealing to my father for his immediate decision on my sanity, having convicted me, she said, in the act of embroidering my canvass on the wrong side. And all this time Miss Smedley was carrying on an animated conversation with Mr. Warren about Lords and Ladies, and Dukes and Grand-dukes.

He did not meet her anecdotes of aristocratic life as I had done, but seemed quite at home in the fashionable world whither she led him.

I observed that Miss Smedley frequently made use of her eye-glass, drawing up her eyes as if it were impossible for her to look any one in the face without thus contorting her features.

I was surprised when Mr. Warren told me afterwards, that near-sightedness had been very much in vogue lately amongst a certain set of the nobility; and that, in consequence, all those who were imitators of rank assumed the appearance of that malady.

"I begin to comprehend more of the weakness of human nature than I ever did before, Mr. Warren," I said; "and I am certain, that if Lady Jessy, from any unforeseen accident, were compelled to walk with crutches, Miss Smedley would limp about the house, and think it vastly fine to do so."

And yet how much, how very much, I had still to learn!

I had been so occupied, so engrossed by the little world within our oaken walls, that I never even thought of the designs, and plots, and heart-burnings of the world without; but now a door seemed opening to me, and I thanked God for the retirement in which I had lived, for certain I felt that I should have fallen into a maze of error, had I been left to wander at will in this great life of ours.

My father, when a younger man, had lived a great deal in society. He had always taken a grave, deep view of things; and whilst his intense love of nature kept him from frivolity, it also imbued



his mind with that earnest kind of contentment so characteristic of those who are busy with the great past.

Now, by Divine power, his heart was sanctified, and holy thought hallowed and made beautiful earthly wisdom.

Altogether, it was a striking sight, those three sitting at the old table, which had been so laughed at in the morning: Mr. Warren, with an expression of humour but partially concealed, throwing many honied words into his conversation, and then sending me across the aforesaid table such deprecating glances, that, in their sunny light, all jealous discomfort melted away; and my father, in a composed straightforward manner, taking up Miss Smedley's sentiments, and unconsciously dealing with them as so much trash.

Oh, it was an evening I have never forgotten.

I could not comprehend the next morning why Miss Smedley was so anxious to learn the precise amount of Mr. Warren's income.

I thought her curiosity on this point quite indelicate.

We, his intimate and chosen associates, had never made any inquiries of the kind.

I became quite ruffled with her earnestness; indeed,

my irritation was so great, that I told her, in no very gentle tone, it was no business of hers to be prying into these matters.

Afterwards, when I came to think quietly of it, I was surprised I had ventured on such a rebuke ; for Miss Smedley, though I think I could in some measure see her faults and weaknesses, had gained a certain sort of ascendancy over me ; that is to say, I felt she knew much more of life than I did ; and whilst I almost disliked her for her conceit, and felt she had no right to carry her head so high, and to assume the patronizing airs she did, a strange, spurious kind of humility sometimes crept over me, as she talked of fêtes and soirées, of balls and operas, at which she lingered till the early day looked down on her.

She had borne a real living part in all these things, whereas to me they had only been shadowed forth, so to speak, on the pages of romance.

### XXXVI.

It is not, perhaps, an overwise thing for a girl to lead a very retired life.

She is induced either to attach too much importance to the amusements of which I have been speaking, or,

in her effort to keep clear of frivolity, she verges on the gloomy and morose.

My dear mother used to say, give the higher tastes, the higher affections, and dissipation will be ashamed to plead for a hearing with your child.

Though I thought Miss Smedley very wise in worldly matters, she could not conceal from me her folly and affectation, her bitterness and weakness.

She was hooking herself on to great folks, hoping she might some day join herself to the courtly set by a fortunate marriage, at least such a one as *she* would call fortunate ; and they, no doubt, were all the time only tolerating her, and thinking her an ill-bred girl for being so forward.

The fact is, she was working very hard for low wages.

Sometimes she would sit up a whole night to metamorphose a dress, so that it might not be recognised in its new trimmings for the same she had worn the evening before ; and she would plan and contrive, and turn skirts into bodies, and sashes into hair-ribbons, with an ingenuity and perseverance worthier of a nobler cause ; and for all this, that world, which is a hard task-master, never gave her in return so much as an hour of real satisfaction.

Of the composure of those who had committed their

way to God, she knew nothing; and I often thought her mind, with its perturbations and anxieties, its dissimulations and dissatisfactions, might not unaptly be compared to the troubled sea.

My intercourse with Miss Smedley was terminated in a way I had not anticipated.

For sometime the typhus fever had been in our neighbourhood.

Many had been laid low by its burning hand; and though there had been only one or two fatal cases, I could see my father was anxious for our sakes. He did not, however, lose his usual cheerfulness, though, as if he had guessed at our fears, and was unwilling to tell us so, he took every occasion of speaking hopefully though seriously about death and eternity, sending, I am sure, as he did so, a sweet influence through our spirits, and causing us to appreciate more entirely his unselfish and high character.

He did not appear even to have thought of himself as of one who might be stricken, or, if he ever did, his apprehensions were kept in the back-ground through his consideration for us.

And yet he was the first laid up!

## XXXVII.

WE did not usually meet in the morning till breakfast-time, which was rather late, for such quiet country people, being about ten o'Clock.

My daily "good morning" to Ada was generally breathed under the warm influence of the sun; but on the morning of which I am now speaking, she entered my room with a cheek of ashy paleness.

She did not knock at my door as was her habitude, and the hesitation, the reserve, which generally, in some measure, characterized her manner to me, the result of my inconsistent and wayward conduct, had entirely left her: some engrossing anxiety occupied her mind, and left no room for that.

"Annie," she said, "I fear your father has taken the infection. He has had a most restless night, and this morning is in a burning fever.

I never knew any one with a better regulated mind than Ada. She always seemed to me in a state of preparation for whatever might happen, maintaining such a sense of confidence in her Heavenly Father, that it gave a repose to her manner, calculated to strengthen and support others who were in trouble. And she still

trusted, she still cast her care and fear, on the great Sustainer; but she was unusually agitated and perturbed, and as soon as she had told me of her sad apprehension, she burst into a violent flood of tears.

This sad visitation was the first messenger sent to thaw my cold and unkindly feelings towards my deep-hearted and gentle step-mother.

Were we not at once united by this common sorrow?

How could I refrain, when I saw her anguish, of reminding her, though such counsel was sadly out of place for me, that the God whom she served was able to deliver her?

Frightened half out of my wits at the unexpected calamity which had come upon us, I ran to my father's room.

He tried to sit up when he saw me, but became so giddy, that he sunk back on the pillow.

"Annie, my love," he said, evidently making an effort to be cheerful, "here is your father regularly in for it, I'm afraid; and the heaviest thought to me is, that I shall infect you all."

It was so strange to see my strong father thus weak, thus prostrated, his very voice subdued almost to woman's softness.

Within my recollection he had never remained in bed for a whole day, and now he could not so much as sit upright.

I had no idea till then how the serious illness of a few hours could overcome the strong ; and now I stood trembling, and wondering, and quite perplexed in thought, at the change I saw wrought in my father.

"I shall get worse than I now am, Annie," he said ; "helpless, and perhaps unconscious ; and Ada will be wishing to turn and move me. Do not allow her to do this. By all your love for me from infancy, I conjure you to look after her, for she is of priceless value, as you will some day discover."

As he spoke, I felt very repentant of all my hard thoughts towards her.

I bent over him, and kissed him, and told him that, now he was ill, all fear of infection had passed from us, and that, as far as in me lay, I would endeavour to carry out his wishes ; and we had just settled this matter when Ada came in.

I knew she had been communing with Him who seeth in secret ; for, shining through all her anxiety, and imparting to it a milder and more chastened character, was a look, which seemed to say, "He that keepeth him will not slumber."

And then she set about making her quiet arrangements for the comfort of the sick chamber.

She partially closed the grey window curtains, so that the light fell softened where my father lay.

She bathed his burning temples with vinegar and water, and then sat down beside him, with a look which made me feel that love was, perhaps, never so strongly expressed as by sorrow.

I found poor Edith in the deserted breakfast-room, where Mr. Warren was vainly trying to compose her. It had sorely distressed her to be shut out from the sick room.

He told me I looked already jaded and worn; "and you will serve your father best," he said, "by husbanding your strength, and not taxing your energies too much at first."

I remember Mr. Warren made breakfast for us that morning, for we were all in confusion, and I could not so much as taste a morsel.

He gave me a small silver viniagrette, begging me to keep it about me; and his tone and manner were so full of sympathy, that tears stood in my eyes.

I could have looked for ever at his kind, grave face, but then my heart was softened, and I was just in the mood to value kindness, Oh, so *very* much.



I did not feel there was anything wrong in thus receiving comfort from him. No, of that I thought afterwards in the solitude of my father's darkened room.

## XXXVIII.

So occupied had I been with our calamity that morning, that I had forgotten the very existence of Miss Smedley; yet I had thought more than ever of Ada and Edith and Mr. Warren.

How mistaken we are when we give the name of friendship to an association forced on us by circumstances!

"I am sorry your papa is so poorly, Annie," Miss Smedley said as she entered the breakfast-room.

"Unwin tells me you all fear it is typhus fever," and she kept her bottle to her nose even whilst speaking.

"I must return home this morning: Ma will be so vexed with me if I stay;" and I noticed she had quite forgotten her drawl.

We could not expect she would run any risk of taking the fever for our sakes; she had never professed any great love for us; but I thought she need not have sheltered her fears under this sudden solicitude to please her mother. It might have deceived Mr. Warren and even Ada, but she had been telling me, only a

few days before, of a successful imposition she had practised on this very parent.

"Oh dear," she continued, "I'm in such a flutter, I can scarcely hold my cup steadily. Ma says its very dangerous to be in the house with anything of the typhoid kind." She quite forgot that the day before, when speaking of one of her flirtations, she had said, "Oh, what does Ma know about anything?" But the case was altered now, and she could bring her mother forward in excuse for her fears.

"How grave you are, Annie!" she continued. "Bless me, you cannot be sure that your papa has typhus fever. Perhaps you are all alarming yourselves without reason.

"I suppose Mrs. Falconer will not leave her husband to-day."

"What a strange head-ache I have! Have you head-ache, Annie?"

She did not seem to wish for an answer, and her questions followed each other with a rapidity which rendered it impossible she should receive one.

Then she suddenly forced herself into one of her fits of affected laughter, and said something about Mr. Warren's interesting appearance, presiding as he did at the breakfast-table.

I know we all felt her frivolity very much. With

our half-awakened fears and depressed hopes, we were just in that state of mind to make it seem to us like heartlessness ; indeed, I think that under different circumstances, even had we been more composed and self-possessed, we should have felt her to be greatly wanting in sympathy.

As her laughter died away, I found myself thinking of what my father had so often said,—that when we gave ourselves up entirely to the enjoyment of what is termed “fashionable life,” making pleasure, falsely so called, the chief end and aim of our existence, our feelings grew callous, our hearts became encrusted in selfishness, and that we were ever seeking our own good, to the utter forgetfulness of our friend or brother.

Hitherto I had received this theoretically ; now, by living example, it was impressed on my heart as a truth.

When our pale, grave Ada made her appearance, wrapped in the thick folds of a shawl, Miss Smedley recoiled from her as from a viper, saying something concerning the dangerous nature of worsted in taking infection about with it ; and all this ere she had made one inquiry after my father, or breathed one expression of sympathy for his suffering wife.

I was irritated with her beyond measure ; and so falsely do we judge of ourselves, that, forgetting the

coldness I had so long maintained towards Ada, I could fancy myself superior to Miss Smedley from the tardy sympathy which had been extorted from me by this sudden visitation.

Oh, the heart is deceitful above all things.

There was a flush on Ada's cheek, but it quickly melted away again.

She took a cup of coffee hastily, standing all the while, and then hurried from the room, making some apology to Miss Smedley, as she did so, for having been unwittingly an intruder at her own table.

"How lovely she looks!" Mr. Warren said, when she had closed the door. "All the goodness and fervency of her nature are shining in her eyes this morning."

Miss Smedley fidgetted, and looked uneasy, then said, with a cold, dispiriting sort of laugh, that she "never knew before Mr. Warren was given to paying compliments."

None of us attempted to smile.

She then told us she should set off at about twelve o'clock, and tried very hard to get Mr. Warren to go with her as far as the station; but he was too much put out to do this, so all her manoeuvring was in vain, and she had to go by herself.

## XXXIX.

OH ! that was a trying morning,—my father getting worse every moment, and no doctor as yet arrived to decide on the degree of danger he was in.

I had always considered Mr. Warren a steady, deep-thinking man, but I never discovered till that day how truly religious he was.

Our fears, like the billows on Judah's lake, became hushed by the words of comfort which he spoke.

I learned how much may lie hidden in the heart till brought to light by adversity.

The pearl would remain, no doubt, in the ocean-depths for ever, were it not brought by some rude storm to the surface ; and, had it not been for this sudden tribulation, I should have remained, at least for some time, unacquainted with the most valuable part of Mr. Warren's character.

"Affliction cometh not from the dust," saith the Preacher ; and what was grievous to us at the time was, in a measure, fraught with blessing for us all.

Dr. Fennell's decision, though he did not think very well of my father, I may say relieved us, for we were nearer the truth, and there was a kind of negative comfort in this.

Throughout the morning, Ada sat by his pillow; and, what with his increasing illness, and her tenderness, which was very touching, and my own excited feelings, I could not check the tears which continued to chase each other down my cheeks.

My father remained very tranquil, though he was unusually heavy, and spoke but little.

I asked Ada to let me bring my work, and sit in the old arm-chair by the window, that I might be at hand to fetch anything for her.

To this she readily assented, and looked many more thanks than she uttered, though I am sure she was less grateful for the deed itself than for the spirit which had suggested it.

It was the warm summer-time, though early in June, and a fragrant and reviving air came in through the open window, for the doctor would not allow any of them to be closed.

It played in the folds of the curtains, and lightly stirred the iron-grey curls on my father's temples.

As I sat there, I looked out on the horse-chestnut trees, glorious in their bloom.

How many times had they thus set out their snowy pyramids to the summer-time, on just such a morning as that on which I looked! I had walked with my

mother to the little church, and bound myself by a chain which was now, I feared, becoming galling to me.

And then I looked down into the valley where the summer air was caressing the trees, and I thought of Ada as I had first seen her in the sweet bloom of earliest girlhood, so fresh, so fair, so innocent, receiving instruction from my father with the docility of a little child.

How had I steeled my heart so long against goodness such as hers !

It is a dangerous thing to indulge prejudice ; from the first moment it is admitted into the heart, some good feeling is ejected to make room for it. It never takes the place of a bad one ; on the contrary, these gather round it as friends, and, like the Upas tree, all fair things wither, if they do not die, under its shadow.

I am confident that, whilst indulging in bitter feelings against Ada, my standard of goodness became lower ; neither did I maintain such strict honesty of purpose.

A littleness of mind took possession of me : I grew bigoted and irritable, and, never daring to look into my own heart, drew a sickly sort of satisfaction from discovering the faults of my neighbours.

She who would please God must carry on a warfare with temptation ; but of this I never thought then, for pre-

judice masks itself so skilfully when dealing with a step-mother, that I did not always recognise it, even when it was deep-seated in my bosom.

## XL.

ALL this time my father's breath was growing shorter and shorter, till at last he seemed to pant.

I feared to distress Ada even by a look of anxiety ; but there was no chance of arousing her fears, awakened as they were already.

I do not think that, during the last hour, she had removed her eyes from his face.

This was all we had to do, to watch over him in silence, and commit him, as we did, over and over again, to the blessing of his faithful Creator.

Towards evening he grew much worse. There was no help for it, Dr. Fennell said ; the disease would take its course.

We must watch and wait, and hope and pray.

Towards evening, Ada grew deadly pale, and once or twice she staggered whilst walking, like an intoxicated person.

She had touched neither luncheon nor dinner, and a great deal of trouble I had to coax her to go



down stairs, and take some toast and coffee in the evening.

"Mind your promise, Annie," my father said to me, when we were alone, which showed me he was more sensible than we had imagined, though there was something wild in his look as he continued,—

"To give me all her young love—her sweet, pure affections, Annie. What had I done to deserve it?"

"O God, I thank thee!" he said, clasping his hands together, and looking upwards as if he really were gazing into the blessed world of love.

Ada's heart must indeed have been a great treasure to him; for, as I have before said, his character had softened very much under her influence; but there was something inexpressibly touching now, in the midst of his heavy suffering, to find him taking her love as balm to his heart.

I could not help feeling, as I listened to him, how much influence woman has in this world—how high and important is her mission!

Had not Ada's affection for my father been enfolded in gentleness, I question very much if its fervency only would have been a solace to him; and had it not been characterised by piety, the most attractive, it would certainly have been divested of much of its winning power.

"I will look after Ada, and take care of her, dear

papa," I said ; and this assurance was better to him than an opiate, for shortly afterwards he fell asleep.

## XLI.

I LINGERED at the supper-table that night, though I scarcely touched a mouthful: I lingered there, weeping nearly the whole time, yet spell-bound.

Mr. Warren, being in the house with us, stood, as it were, under the shadow of our sorrow ; and this, no doubt, gave a more perceptible tenderness to his manner, and a greater softness to his voice ; indeed, Edith and I both thought that, from the first, he had, in a great measure, looked on our troubles as his own, and this made us think of his character as the very antipodes of Miss Smedley's.

That night my father's fever rapidly increased, and it was very evident to me, from the way in which he spoke, that he was not altogether himself.

He was a great deal too unreserved, and touched on subjects which, in my presence, I am sure he would, when in health, have carefully avoided.

For instance, he suddenly told me there was a diamond in the casket, a pearl in the household, but that, being blind by reason of my own folly, I could not see it.

Edith was compelled by severe head-ache to go early to bed, but all that night Mr. Warren sat in the library. We could not persuade him to take any rest.

Ada and I kept watch by the sick bed, and never before had I felt so intensely the solemnity of the silence which night brings with it.

The ticking of the kitchen clock came with wonderful distinctness up the old staircase, and the night wind sighed as it fluttered at the open window.

We spoke but little to each other—we were too busy watching for that; and when at last a hush came on my father's restless tossings, and we heard from his breathing that he had fallen asleep, we looked at each other and smiled,—smiled in that room of sadness, and I felt that Ada recognised the better understanding that this sorrow had so silently established between us.

My poor father's sleep was but short, yet we could see, even by the light of the shaded candle, that he was quite himself.

"Ada, my darling," he said in his old tone, "I will promise to speak very gently, but you must let me tell you my dream,—such a strange dream, and you, Annie, must listen very attentively."

I knew Ada was very much afraid lest he should excite himself too much, but she did not like to seem

even to thwart his wishes, and so she promised to be very attentive, begging him only not to raise his voice above a whisper, and she put her feet on the green cushion, and sat just as she used to do when he read to her.

"I thought," said my father, "the air was sweet-scented with the hay, as it now is, that the heaven above me was blue and almost cloudless, and the whole atmosphere was impregnated with music, soft, low, and tender, yet breathing of love high and holy, such as Christ the merciful bears to man.

"Annie, I thought you came towards me blind-folded, and you said the world was dark and dreary.

"How can you discern the glory and the beauty which so dazzle me, my child,' I exclaimed, 'with the dense veil of prejudice thus falling over you?'

"At this remark you seemed a little discomfited, and said it was not *prejudice*, but *truth*.

"If you could but see the sun-rays steeping in gold the towers of the distant hamlet, you would give truth another name than darkness,' I replied.

"And then night suddenly fell thickly on your path, —night with storm, and you were frightened at the moaning of the wind, and the groaning of the forest boughs. You rushed forward and clung to me, and, in so doing, the bandage partially slipped from your eyes,

and I observed that, though night remained, it grew very clear and lovely; stars were studding the skies, and the moon was sending up in the east silvery harbingers of her approach; night-scented flowers suddenly breathed out fragrance around us; and, as we gazed, Annie, all this beauty and light became Ada, our own dear Ada; she stood before us in ineffable serenity, and then I awoke."

How my heart burned within me as he spoke!

I tried to keep calm, and Ada whispered to me not to say much, for that, though apparently quiet, he was excited.

I could not help speaking, but I went very softly to his side, and, kneeling down, took his burning hand between mine, and, in a very low voice, said,—

"There is truth as well as beauty in your dream. You know I have been so blinded by prejudice, that I could not see the mental loveliness of your dear Ada; but during this night of storm and weeping, I have thrown off the dark prejudice of my life, and Ada stands before me as she really is, as she so long has been."

Ada had been weeping gently whilst I spoke. At length she said, "And this reconciliation between us, Annie, is the beauty of our night."

"Oh, make out my dream as you like, girls," my father

said, and he laughed in a wilder way than we liked, and we begged him not to talk any more just then.

### XLII.

THE summer morning was breaking beautifully on the distant hills, and the world was throwing off darkness with a rosy smile, but there was no kind of improvement in my father. We could not deceive ourselves: he was much worse.

His cheeks were flushed, and his eyes had that burning glare in them which it is so painful to witness in one we love.

Mr. Warren was continually at the door, asking in whispers what he could do for us, and how he could help us.

He was so kind and good, we could not but be very grateful to him; and his manner was rendered all the more impressive by the sorrow that influenced it.

I remember feeling afraid that I was thinking a great deal too much about him; and the conviction that, by so doing, I was becoming untrue to Lynn, and therefore unworthy of him, was most painful to me; but these harassing reflections were soon forgotten in my increased anxiety for my poor father.

Throughout the whole day his mind wandered, but he spoke so fast and indistinctly, that we could not make out what he said, except, indeed, a few words occasionally, and these were expressive of love to Ada, and injunctions to her to bear up bravely against my unkindness.

Oh! this was most cutting to me, but I had richly deserved it.

It grieved me sadly to see Ada looking so ill: her strength seemed giving way in spite of the strong heart within her.

Mrs. Hall, a new neighbour of ours, whose husband had lately taken a fine country-seat in the immediate vicinity, called that morning to make inquiries after my father.

We knew but little of her, but she had greatly won me by her gentle manners and placid countenance.

When I heard her voice in the hall, I slipped quietly from the sick room, and hastened down stairs to speak to her.

"Are you afraid of me, Mrs. Hall?" I inquired.

"Afraid," she answered so cheerily, that it felt like a breath of fresh air. "I wish very much to have a little chat with you;" so we went on into the library, which, though of late, always greeting us

gravely with my father's vacant chair, was still my favourite retreat.

"If you will promise not to think me a most intrusive creature," she said, "I will make a proposal: let me remain with you to-night. I am sure Mrs. Falconer must need some aid; and if she thinks I am watching there, she may perhaps rest a little by your father's side."

"What will you think of me," I replied, "when I tell you that I intended to ask you to come and help us? There was something in your face which told me you would not be angry at such a request."

"How kind of you!" she replied; and then she went on trying to persuade me that I was conferring on her a great favour by allowing her to come.

"I could not ask Mrs. Masterman," I said, turning to Edith, who had joined us in the library, "on account of her 'sad reverses;'" and there was a bright though momentary interchange of smiles between us.

Miss Bartlett, with her restless heart, and dangerous tongue, and feverish ways—the very thought of her seemed to fall on my spirit like the shadow of impatience.

It was a great relief to me when I found that Ada thankfully accepted Mrs. Hall's proposal, though, almost



all the time I was conversing with her, tears were quietly rolling down my cheeks.

I had got into such an excited, nervous state, that I had no power whatever to restrain them.

Mr. Warren handed Mrs. Hall into her carriage, and then returned to us in the library.

We stood together at the window, looking down on the sloping lawn and the silvery daisies, and the soft shadows of the old elm trees, and the rich summer air came in on us with its gift of balm.

Surely the tones of Mr. Warren's voice must have had a consolatory power, as well as the words he spoke ; for when I returned to Ada, there was a calmness at my heart, and a stronger will to trust and wait patiently than I had ever felt before.

#### XLIII.

It was well we had Mrs. Hall with us that night, for there was a hopefulness about her which imperceptibly shed its influence over us.

She sympathized with us very deeply, and yet had a certain degree of quiet cheerfulness which we had found it impossible to maintain.

Towards midnight, when my father sat up in bed,

and talked very fast, I am sure that Ada and I would have been beside ourselves had not Mrs. Hall continually assured us, in her calm way, that such excitement was common in severe fever; and she stood out so confidently on the bright side, that we grew half ashamed of our fears.

Then, in the midst of all our flutter and flurry, she began a long story of her little boy, and told us how he had been given over by the doctors; not that she ever finished it—such was not her custom; but from the tone of her voice, from the contentment in her smile, we were led to draw for ourselves a happy conclusion.

She had a peculiar way of pouring out fragments of a thousand subjects in one stream of talk; and though contrary to all the rules of conversation, so musical were her tones, that it scarcely distressed you.

As to proper names, you had to fill up these vacancies to the best of your ability. She never could remember them. It was Mr. What's-his-name, or Mrs. Thingum-bob, as the case might be; and as for places, you could only judge of these in a very general way. If she talked of white-bait, for instance, your imagination might lead you to suppose that she must, in thought, be hovering somewhere about the eastern end of London;

or if she spoke of palm trees, you were naturally led to feel that the scene of her narrative lay nearer Jericho than Regent Circus; but, after all, it was guess-work, for, as to places, she never named them—never.

A dear creature she was, though, in spite of all this absence,—such high firm principle, such self-control.

I should not so soon have discovered this, but from the very intimate association into which we were suddenly thrown, and her very situation in my father's sick room brought strikingly forward the most sterling parts of her character.

Yet, even during that anxious night, I felt a smile playing on my lips, as she gently and pleasantly told us of her housemaid's dangerous illness from the worst kind of small-pox; and she treated the whole matter so musically and sunnily, that had I been beyond the reach of hearing her words, I might have supposed she had been giving an account of a child sleeping amongst summer flowers.

But it was not this which called up the smile, so out of place in that room of suffering: it was the way in which, without even a momentary pause, she attached to this disaster an account of a new singing-bird which a naval friend of hers had just brought from Australia.

How great was her sorrow, when my poor father began to whistle in imitation of its song !

We quite loved Mrs. Hall for her concern in the matter, and all her next story, which followed soon after, was told in a whisper ; not that this was of much good, for it went with a breezy sort of sound into every corner of the sick chamber.

I really do not know what we should have done without Mrs. Hall that night. She had positively to wrestle with my poor father, who insisted on going down stairs to send "that man" out of the house. He must have heard Mr. Warren moving on the steps, for they creaked and moaned to the slightest sound.

Ada was like a reed shaken by the wind, the very picture of dismay.

He threw his arms about frightfully, and with such power, that we were obliged to call in Mr. Warren to our aid.

Oh, that was an awful night to us all ! I cannot think of it now without a shudder.

But the crowning trial of those dark hours was, that he grew suddenly harsh in his manner towards Ada : it seemed as if, in the turmoil of fever, he had mislaid his old kind heart ; and the poor thing was so unprepared for this, so utterly unable to meet it with anything like composure, that it was sad even to look at her.

Only by Mr. Warren did my father seem in any way influenced ; and whilst his strong arms were round him, which they were for many hours, he desisted from his purpose of going down stairs to extinguish the fire which his imagination had kindled in the servants' hall.

Mr. Warren humoured him, as we in our affright had not presence of mind to do, and told him that the engines were at work, and that they were getting on very well without him.

Just towards morning, when the summer stars began to grow pale, he let Ada approach him, and did not attempt to drive her away, as he had done throughout the greater part of the night.

I hailed this as a good omen ; and, indeed, so it afterwards proved to be.

The morning light seemed to bring hope along with it.

How we had watched and waited for it ! And now as it steeped the curtains in its rosy hues, and lighted up the old picture-frames into gold, I am sure we all grew more courageous, though it revealed to us, with painful distinctness, my father's flushed face and his lips, which were parched to breaking.

## XLIV.

BUT the storm was over,—the crisis past. As we watched by him, he fell asleep.

For many hours he lay there, and gradually his breath became gentle as a little child's.

The sun-rays came in slantingly from the west, when he opened his eyes ; and then he asked Ada, in his dear old tone of love, to sing him a hymn. This request affected us all very much. Ada, poor Ada ! to require of her anything like gladness at such a time !

She sat down and wept, and prayed, and then rose strengthened, and said she would try.

Never did I love her more than when, in staggering and imperfect articulation, she commenced :—

“ Through the darkness, through the storm,  
Father, we have seen thy form ;  
Now the night of fear is o'er,  
We discern Hope's smiling shore !  
Help us the grateful chorus high to swell,  
We love,—we bless thee, Saviour ; all is well ! ”

Ada had taxed her strength very much to go through

this composedly, and she had scarcely risen from her chair, when she fell in a swoon.

We carried her into the next room, with as little noise as possible, and laid her on the sofa.

She soon recovered herself, but a weakness hung about her which it moved us all greatly to see.

Ada was one of those who disliked very much to arouse any commotion about herself, so she struggled very hard to regain her calmness ; but she was altogether upset on this the first morning of our hope.

Her mind had been so swayed to and fro in her anxiety, drooping, fearing, trusting by turns, that we could see now in this pause how much all this had physically affected her ; but she was soon at my father's bedside, again telling me, with trembling delight, of the coolness that was stealing over him.

A sort of fear, the old fear of that time, seems to steal over me now, as I remember how my thoughts clung round Mr. Warren, in spite of the anxiety in which I took so large a part.

There was a blank in the room when he left it, and my very hopefulness concerning my father grew clouded when he was not there.

Oh, it was wrong, very wrong, to feel thus. It was wrong to take pleasure in his looks of kindness.

"O, Lynn, Lynn," I said to myself, "why did we ever consent to that hasty marriage?"

From that time, my father improved rapidly, and was soon able to lie on the sofa, and talk to us in his old cheerful way.

Mrs. Hall, too, began her stories again. They had quite ceased during our time of fear; and my dear father was amused and interested in them, simple as they were; for the mind which has been prostrated by illness takes amusement, in a child-like way, from trifles; and though he sometimes grew a little puzzled as to whether the "What-do-you-call-it" was a hamlet, or a thriving town, and could not always tell whether "Sir Somebody Something" was a Baronet or a fortunate Alderman, yet, on the whole, he made out her stories famously.

He sympathized, too, with her heartily when her knitting was entangled,—which, by-the-by, was often the case,—sometimes helping her to unravel it, and, at other times, smiling most perversely at her trouble; and by all this we knew he was amending.

#### XLV.

As things got round into their old course again, we had leisure to observe how pale Edith looked.



With my father's increasing strength, Ada's bright looks had also returned ; but Edith, though she had had nothing to do with our nursing, was, in appearance, more of an invalid than my father ; so it was settled that not only Ada, but that Edith and Mr. Warren, were to accompany my father in his proposed excursion to the seaside, whilst I was to be left sole housekeeper.

"Do you know, Annie," Edith said, one evening, quite unexpectedly, "I have discovered something? Now guess what it is."

I was vexed with myself for blushing, and then turned pale ; but lately, even a sudden exclamation startled me, and mystery of any kind filled me with suspicion, so truly does conscience make cowards of us all.

"Ah," she continued, laughing, "I have found out that Mr. Warren is very fond of you.

"Nay, now," she added pleasingly, "don't look grave and vexed ; you know I have seen a great deal of him lately, whilst you were up stairs nursing ; and he told me he had every reason to believe, from your manner, that you would never look kindly on him, and that he would not distress you by persecuting you."

"I am glad he has come to this determination, Edith dear," I replied. "I have more than once suspected he

was partial to me, and have, in consequence, been reserved towards him. It is very wrong to give encouragement merely to gratify ones own vanity. Remember how hardly we thought of Miss Smedley for doing this very thing."

Oh, what a struggle I had with myself to say all this composedly! How my heart, like a wild bird caged, was fluttering in its unrest! My lips quivered, and, had not twilight veiled me, Edith must at once have perceived my agitation.

"Promise that you will not be angry with me, Annie," she said, kneeling at my side, as was her custom when in complete unreserve. "I entered into a little plot with Mr. Warren, in which it seems so like deception to continue, that I shall at once break through the trammels.

"I promised him," she said, with a great deal of hesitation, "to try and find out, at least to learn from you, if you cared for him." I felt faint to sickness as she continued.

"You see, Annie dear, I could scarcely do less for him when he had been so kind to me through all my loneliness. Could I, dearest?"

I tried to speak, but could not, so I only pressed her hand, and she continued :—

"I am afraid I was very foolish, but I did tell him that I was sure I could judge in a minute from your face if he was. I mean, if you thought a great deal about him."

"Oh, Edith," I exclaimed, "how *could* you?" and then she went on:—

"I, who have lived with you and loved you all my life, who could know you so well?"

"Then he said, that though he wished me to assist him in discovering the real state of your feelings towards him, he feared very much to learn the result of my inquiries. He *feared*, he said, because the doubt was easier to bear than the certainty of your utter disregard."

What a battle I had with all my feelings of tenderness and love! How I tried, by every principle of right within me, to hold out in brave composure! and yet a strange irresolution influenced my words and manner, and more than once I feared that Edith's sisterly perception would discover the warfare going on within me.

I summoned up all my resolution, and said, as calmly as I could, "You must tell Mr. Warren, Edith, not to think of me any more. Tell him that I am very grateful to him for all his kindness."

"Oh, I understand you," answered Edith, smiling in a disappointed kind of way: "I will say that you thank

him for his preference, but that, gratitude being a very different thing from love, you cannot exactly comply with his wishes."

"Oh, Edith," I said, "how can you talk such nonsense on so serious a matter?"

She was now sitting on the ground, coiled up at my feet. She looked distressed and puzzled.

"Well then, seriously," she continued, "what shall I say, darling?"

"Say that I thank him for his love, that I value it, and treasure it. No, that will not do. Oh, Edith, help me."

I had never struggled so hard in my life before to remain unmoved and composed; but it was more than I could manage. I burst into a violent fit of weeping.

I laid my head on Edith's bosom, and her warm tears fell on my cheeks.

Never had her sister's heart seemed more precious to me than at that moment. "Our lives were girdled by one belt of love;" and now, in spite of the great secret between us, though Edith was as it were acting in the dark, and consoling me, she scarcely knew why, what peace, what strength I drew from her sweet sympathy!

"It is so difficult to manage in these matters kindly, yet firmly," Edith said, confidently; "but don't make

yourself unhappy about it, dear. You may depend on my pretty speeches to manage all for you.

"I would ask him to take me into the heart from which you turn, Annie," she continued, with a bright smile, trying, I know, to coax me out of my moodiness ; "only I know it would be of no use now. I should have managed better, and kept you out of the way, if I had hoped for success."

I am afraid something like jealousy shot through my heart as she said this ; but I did not parley with it and encourage it. On the contrary, I was angry with myself that her words had given me such a pang ; and she continued, in her own natural earnest tone, " Really, Annie, he is very good-looking and gentlemanly. Papa likes him extremely, and somehow he has made himself so completely one of us, that if you could, I mean, if, at any future time, you thought you might be able to think more lovingly of him, Oh, it would be so nice ! "

As she looked on me in her old thoughtful, confiding way, how strong was the wish that came over me, to tell her my darkening secret ! for its shadows rested more heavily than they had ever done on my every thought.

"That can never be, my sweet Edith," I exclaimed. I had regained, in a measure, my gloomy composure, though there was a coldness at my heart like ice. " You

must marry, and be happy, and I will be aunt, and preside in your nursery."

## XLVI.

WHEN Ada came in, she thought us both in a cheerful mood, and the good understanding now existing among us had cheered me more than any one would have supposed; for the daily unacknowledged coldness which had been so long as an iceberg between us had made familiar household duties wear an unnatural and severe character; and now that my wicked prejudice was disarmed and overthrown, Ada's disinterested love came pleasantly forward, and brightened our home.

My father never made any direct allusion to this; but I remember, on the evening of the day of which I have been speaking, that he said, cheerily, "Nothing will ever alter my opinion of the nature of trouble, Annie. Though there is no place for it in heaven, it is a faithful servant of God for all that, and has brought many more into the good old way than prosperity."

I felt half inclined, just by way of retort, to say that he made a great exception to this rule, for that it was not trouble which had so softened and improved him, as it was all Ada's work; only I knew, from experience,

it was no use trying this kind of thing with my father : he always had the best of it, and would have been sure to have made good his assertion in some way or other ; so I only saucily told him that he had behaved much better since his illness ; and that, if Ada did not spoil him, he would be a pattern to us all.

And what did my father say in reply, but that he must look after Mr. Warren, who was humouring and flattering me so preposterously, that I should grow conceited and vain, past all bearing ?

This stilled my impudent mood in a moment, more especially as Mr. Warren had entered the room whilst my father was speaking ; and I thought he seemed to take a happy sort of revenge from the burning flush which his words brought to my cheeks.

I remembered that evening a long time : so happily it passed in pleasant converse, that I forgot my lowness of spirits, and felt for a little while almost light-hearted ; only, when Mr. Warren bid me " good night," there was a gravity, a sadness about him, which haunted me, ah, for many a day.

## XLVII.

EARLY the next morning they all set off for Brighton ;

and as soon as our neighbours knew that I was alone, they came pouring in on me; for the dread of infection was now gone, and the dear old library was generally my reception-room.

Miss Bartlett was so busy with her questions, that it was quite a toil to unravel them.

She never saw Mr. Forrester now. She wondered there had not been a match between us, and this was converted into a question by the sharp little "eh?" of inquiry which followed it.

She hoped I would not pick and choose, and never be suited at last.

Could she only have seen Mr. Warren, I am sure she would have made something or other out of his intimacy with our family; but I had always fancied that he tried to avoid visitors, especially those who were on familiar terms with us; and though easy and graceful in his manner when at home, if a stranger happened accidentally to drop in, he became all at once reserved, as if shrinking from observation of any kind.

This often puzzled me, as there was nothing about him of which he had need to be ashamed; but then he might have thought differently, for it is not those most highly gifted who set the most value on themselves,



and I am sure he was often unconscious of the admiring looks cast upon him.

## XLVIII.

BUT I must return to Miss Bartlett.

I believe she began to entertain some serious fears lest I should at last be that most dreaded of all characters,—an old maid.

“Take good care,” she continued, “that you do not throw away all your chances.

“I speak from experience,” she said. “Several times I might have done well for myself,”—and she sighed at the memory of those by-gone days,—“but, indeed, I was too particular;” and then she adroitly led me to infer, without any direct assertion, and yet more palpably than she had ever done before, that she might have been in Ada’s place, had she chosen to disoblige me.

It was tiresome work to be her auditor, but there was no help for it.

So I sat there, struggling all the while with a thousand thoughts,—sometimes keeping them at bay; but, whilst doing so, letting in a thousand more which had no business there.

I, who could be loved so truly, and so well, must, of necessity, throw it from me as a sin.

I remember all this time it was a grievous sorrow to me to feel that, even by these reflections, I was wronging Lynn—noble, self-sacrificing Lynn, who, as far as in his power lay, had left me free and independent. Could I not, for his sake, shut out all others from my thoughts? I wished to do so very much; and yet so uncontrollable, so perverse was the spirit within me, that, almost whilst framing these better resolutions, I found myself envying Edith.

I said to myself, "Happy girl! she is with him now, and perhaps—perhaps, in time. Oh, it was a most painful apprehension,—he might transfer his love to her."

I had often heard of these things,—how an ardent lover had, through circumstances, given, in the course of years, all his warm affections to the sister of her whom he had once loved, and it might be so again. It might be so now. I grew sick at heart, vexed with life, and almost weary of it. What a sigh I gave!

It positively startled Miss Bartlett, and caused her to complain of my impatience and irritability of manner.

If she would only have rattled on, and left me alone, I could have borne it; but, "Is it not so?"

"Don't you think so?" terminated every remark, however trifling.

"Upon my word, Annie," she exclaimed, whenever the little query was left unanswered, "I begin to think you must have been seriously in love with Mr. Forrester; you look so confused and chafed when his name is mentioned."

"I hope to goodness he didn't jilt you? Don't look so put out, my dear. These things happen to girls quite as pretty as you, though they don't publish them in the newspaper. Heigh ho! I've had plenty of attention in my lifetime."

Had Miss Bartlett known how miserable she was making me, she would not, I believe, have thus rattled on.

I did not, however, make any excuses for her, but determined she was the most disagreeable person I had ever met with. I even thought her more unendurable than Miss Smedley. They were, in truth, very different from each other.

Life did not wear so attractive an aspect to the elder as to the younger.

Miss Smedley was walking side by side with its pleasures; she was unsatisfied with them, and grew provoked and angry with herself for being so, and this gave a discontent to her heart, and a restlessness to her manner.

Miss Bartlett was further on. Already the slanting shadows of evening fell on her. Still, still she was seeking for pleasure—hunting for it—Oh! so madly; and of the folly and vanity of this pursuit she was at times secretly persuaded, and this made her bitter towards those whom life still caressed.

Poor Miss Bartlett!

But was I better than those I thus judged?

They were not battling with conscience, and then yielding to the first touch of temptation. They were not loving where it was sin to love.

If the world did not lure me to join its giddy round, it was no merit of mine that I avoided it; and if I refrained from making self the prominent subject of conversation, it was no proof that my mind was better regulated than theirs.

The restraint in my case arose from the peculiar nature of my difficulties, which did not admit of revelation.

#### XLIX.

MRS. MASTERMAN heard I was alone, so she hastily packed up her knitting, and kindly came over to spend a few days with me; and even the reiteration of her

"sad reverses" was a pleasing echo in contrast to Miss Bartlett's bitterness of satire.

How thankful I was that I had the opportunity of telling her what Ada really was to us all; that our drooping hearts revived under her gentle influence, and that she went on gladdening and brightening the hearts in her way!

I told her how, by our sudden trial, I had been led to trample on my dark prejudice, and how we felt that, in this instance, a step-mother had been a blessing to us.

I felt greatly relieved when I had told Mrs. Masterman all this, for heavily had it lain on my heart,—my silence concerning Ada,—during my last interview with Mrs. Masterman, when silence became accusation.

She received these my glad tidings most sweetly, rejoicing heartily that her fears had been groundless; indeed, she seemed to consider it quite a fault in her ever to have imagined we could from the first have been otherwise than happy. "It shows us," she said, "how universal is the prejudice against step-mothers."

We are not satisfied to allow that they possess weaknesses and frailties in common with all others; but we school ourselves from childhood to think of them as inextricably mixed up with hardness of heart and deter-

mination of evil purpose. "And our ancestors were as blind on this subject as we are," I said; "for there is a proverb of the fifteenth century, given, I think, to Bishop Andrews:—

"'Take care of a step-mother; the very name of her sufficeth.'"

"Ah," replied Mrs. Masterman, "the misapprehension on this matter is altogether a melancholy one.

"If there be some who are unfaithful to the trust committed to them, it arises not necessarily from their office, but from a lack of that high and holy principle which can alone guide us on the path made so difficult by prejudice."

"Yes," I answered, "and it is the children who generally put stumbling-blocks in the way.

"They are prepared to receive the new comer as an interloper, and instead of welcoming her as their father's friend, treat her as an enemy in disguise. Oh, it is too bad!

"I speak from experience.

"I know that in every possible way I thwarted and opposed Ada; not that she had given me any cause for vexation: my perverse conduct arose simply from the opinion I had, in common with others, unconsciously

adopted, that kindness and goodness found no place in a step-mother's bosom.

"If her pale and anxious face made any impression on me, it was but a momentary softening. I soon steeled myself in the old prejudice, and was proof against her forbearance."

"Well, then," said Mrs. Masterman, smiling, "I am sure Dr. Fennell never guessed how kind a friend this dreaded attack of typhus fever would prove. It has routed you out of your wrong-mindedness, and you will have cause to bless God for it all your life."

Ah! she could not resist it. I had brought her by my observations to the very edge of the stream, so in she plunged, and floated pleasantly on to the musical murmur of her "sad reverses," telling me, with a mixture of drollery and earnestness, that her husband had been a better man ever since they had come on him; "and, for my own part," she said, looking on me with her open, honest face, "it is to these 'sad reverses' I am indebted for all that is serious in my character."

After this we fell into a pleasant conversation on the uses and benefits of affliction. A quiet, reasonable talk we had; but at last the old lady grew quite into an ecstasy about her "sad reverses," which set me laughing

so, that I was positively obliged to turn my back towards her.

Kind, simple-hearted Mrs. Masterman ! It sometimes puzzled me to tell how she managed to season her discourse, or to give point to her sentences, before these misfortunes, if they were really misfortunes, fell on her.

But my inclination to merriment was soon subdued. I had placed myself opposite the window, and sat looking out on the old garden chair, whose place had long been under an aged and moss-covered elm ; but it was neither the chair nor the shadows of the old tree which rivetted my attention. I discerned Mr. Warren's book and cane lying on the green seat, just as he had left them, when Edith had called him hastily to assist her in arranging a basket of fruit as a present for Mrs. Hall.

Ah me ! why should the sight of anything belonging to him so affect me ?

#### L.

FROM time to time, I heard from Ada and Edith.

Sometimes Edith's letters were full of harmless pleasantries about Mr. Warren ; and whilst I grew vexed with myself for not being able to receive them in the



light-hearted way she expected, I prized my letters all the more for the mention they made of him.

I did not do this cheerfully, but with a great deal of regret, and feeling myself every day more unworthy of Lynn Forrester.

Edith did not like Brighton very well. Though she could amuse herself with a home-flirtation, and receive my lectures on it with the prettiest grace imaginable, she was not the girl to dress herself out for admiration, and walk on the cliff, or sit for effect on the pier listening to the band.

An attractive creature she was though, with her slim, pliant figure, and complexion of transparent delicacy.

She seemed, in truth, too airy and fragile for this hard material world. Her dewy eyes of violet blue had sometimes so soft an expression in them, that it made me anxious ; but these were, no doubt, my sister fancies. She would do well enough after a little change ; and though I was much more matter-of-fact and stronger looking than Edith, I was shrinking from the battle of life in a more cowardly way than she did.

I believe that, in my circumstances, she would have borne up much more bravely ; for it is not possible to judge from outward appearances of the heart's strength or power of endurance. She would not, I am sure, have

thought about Mr. Warren as I did: her mind was better directed, her thoughts more under control, than mine. Again, I was full of resolves to be true to Lynn. I would struggle against all intrusive thoughts. It was not too late: I would yet be worthy of him.

Ada, too, was wishing to return from Brighton.

My father was unnaturally irritable and restless, and the doctor said that, if not kept very quiet, he ran a risk of brain fever. Where could he be so retired, so tenderly dealt with, as at home?

I heartily acquiesced in all this, for I was weary of the companionship of my thoughts, and hailed with delight the idea of their speedy return.

Dr. Slaffen, who had been absent for many weeks on a visit to his sons in Germany, came in unexpectedly on me. I was more glad than I had ever been to see his cheerful face. It was quite exhilarating to listen to him, as he told me of the wonderful improvement of his boys; for boys he would still call them, though the eldest had passed his examination at the Medical College at Berlin, and had, as the expression is, fairly begun the world for himself.

Dr. Slaffen seemed a younger and happier man altogether when thus talking to me in his love and interest of them.

His very nonsense, which, from its piquancy, did sometimes really amuse us very much, grew more chastened : it occupied, at all events, a subordinate place in his conversation.

Not that he had left off diagram drawing,—Oh, no ; this was a part of his nature, and he covered my blotting-paper with lines and letters whilst I was writing to Edith.

He had also taken to caricaturing since his visit to Germany, and drew such a grotesque, skeleton-like out-line of his eldest son, that I enclosed it in my letter.

I was bitterly disappointed when I found that Mr. Warren had determined not to return with our party.

I believe I am speaking fairly of myself, when I say, that I struggled with this feeling,—yes, I am sure I tried my best to consider it wise and best that thus it should be ; and I said to myself more than once, very energetically, as I sat with the letter in my hand, “I will be true to Lynn,—I will be true to Lynn.” But the struggle within was far greater than any one would have supposed, and I became pettish and morose, and was in a fair way of losing every vestige of good-temper, though, in early girlhood, I had always been considered placid and gentle. But we do not know what is in us, till it is called out by trial ; and though it is very easy to scatter smiles and

soft words on a smooth pathway, it requires strength from God to be gentle, and patient, and hopeful, when the storm of trial gathers, and the cutting winds of adversity begin to blow.

I could no longer keep up the appearance of amiability.

Why was I the only one of my family thus singled out to meet misfortune? Why had I a secret so oppressive to struggle with, so great to bear? Why? Because the discipline was needful for me. The chastening, though I knew it not at the time, was sent to correct and purify that spirit which, if left to itself, would have ingloriously slumbered on the lap of indolence and pleasure.

## LI.

IN our very largest great chair, I sat watching the sparkling coals,—for we had begun our fires in the evening,—looking, I am sure, as Dr. Slaffen said, the very picture of discontent.

He certainly was changed and more thoughtful than formerly, but with this gravity his kindness had deepened too; there was more real concern for others about him, though his mode of expressing it was softer.

“Something is wrong with you, Annie,” he said;

"and I, who have known you almost from infancy, am not likely to be mistaken. Ah, blush, and make excuses," he continued; "this is natural enough,—all very modest and girl-like: I expected it. But though I'm so fond of jokes, and though I've made you laugh so heartily over my diagrams, Annie, I have a heart that can feel keenly for those I love, and I love you all; and nothing can hinder me from seeing the oppression which rests like a cloud on you;" and the dear old man looked so kindly on me, that I was ready to cry.

"If any one requires change, it is you, Annie," he said, with a peculiar air, intended to impress me with the idea that he knew much more of the state of my feelings than I did myself.

Then I told him of my father's nervous state. I felt anxious to turn his thoughts from me, and how I was fretting about Edith; which, indeed, was quite true, for her cough had returned.

It seemed as if the sea-air and the east wind were her enemies, and that the trip to Brighton, from which I had hoped so much for all, had brought about little good.

In a short time, Dr. Slaffen became so interested about Edith, that his thoughts were completely diverted from me; not that this had been altogether a ruse on

my part, but still it was much pleasanter that his affectionate concern should take root in safer ground than in my troubles ; and if he had a favourite in the family, it was Edith.

Now that I had fairly awakened his fears for her, he thought no more of my ungracious manner ; indeed, I forgot, for a time, my own troubles, as, sitting there together, and looking at the golden flames, we planned a thousand things for Edith, amongst which I treasured, as the best, his idea, that a continental trip would benefit the dear girl.

By the way, I would note it down for the benefit of all those who are distressed in mind, that it alleviates suffering greatly to occupy oneself with hearty goodwill about others.

At first, it goes sadly against the grain to push aside self pleading, as it always does so earnestly to be cherished ; but this once done, our own troubles lose much of their importance.

Not that employment is of itself a cure for sorrow : it needs heavenly balm to ease the wounded spirit ; but I was wandering in the dark then, and it was Ada who drew me out into the light.

How much I owe to my step-mother, it is impossible to tell ; for had she not been gifted with a more than

usual share of forbearance, she would have thrown off all kindly feeling for me at the very outset of her married life, instead of receiving me as she did with open arms, on my tardy acknowledgment of error.

## LII.

THERE was so much bustle on the first day of the return, that I had not an opportunity of saying one word to Edith alone.

I was longing to ask her many questions about Mr. Warren, yet, at the same time, fearing to do so.

Poor girl! she was suffering from severe cold, and my father seemed strangely out of sorts. He could not bear the light, and the least noise distressed him exceedingly.

I put his slippers by the fire for him, and Ada made him tea in his own China cup. At this distance of time, I cannot help smiling at the clearness of my memory; for I distinctly remembered the pattern on the old China. There was a Swiss peasant-girl on one side, holding in her hand a string, which was attached to a lamb on the other.

I tried to persuade myself that, now we had all gathered round the old hearth again, I was happy;

and at night, I thought to myself, "when I am alone with Edith, she will say something about Mr. Warren."

Ah, but I was mistaken—she did not ; so I had nothing to do but to ask her what had become of him.

I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror as I put this simple question to my sister. How pale I was ! It had cost me a great deal to make up my mind, even to Edith, about him ; and this very circumstance ought to have convinced me, more than anything else, of the necessity there was to keep my wayward thoughts under control.

Edith answered my question in a sweet, truthful, sisterly way.

"I think he was afraid to return with us, Annie," she said. "Afraid of *you*,—I mean, afraid of your distant manner towards him !" She was in bed when she said this. "In fact," she continued, "he told me so."

I crept up on the bed by her side, and lay down ; but this did not still my throbbing heart, and then I wept—*wept*, unreservedly on her bosom.

She put her arms round me, but I could not still my sobs : having once let them loose, they became unmanageable.



Edith was much distressed at my emotion, and for some time was silent.

At length she said, "Annie, dear, I cannot understand why you are so distressed, if you do not in some degree care for Mr. Warren. You must be deceiving yourself, dear sister, and he must have crept by stealth into that little heart of yours. I wish it were so," she continued; "for you will never find a better husband, Annie, believe me, or one who loves you more dearly;" and she quite warmed up as she spoke.

"He asked me, Annie," she said, "if I thought you loved any other; and, when I told him no, I was quite sure you did not, he said, 'I had made him a much happier man;' and he kissed my hand, and spoke with such fervour, that any one coming in on us accidentally would have thought he was a lover of mine.

"And then he said that 'perhaps—perhaps, in some time, all would yet be right.' His voice grew tremulous, and though there were no tears in his eyes, it seemed as if his heart were weeping."

### LIII.

O, MY secret! my secret! it seemed positively boiling within me.

There I lay in silence,—I who now felt convinced that I loved him fondly. He was the only being on earth I had ever seen who had taken my heart captive.

I had always made a boast of my indifference, treating all, even those who were specially attentive to me, with a calm and dignified composure, so that Edith often rallied me on my heartlessness, and Amy Robins was in and out again of what she called love a dozen times and more during this period of my general unconcern.

But just as I had begun to pride myself on the iron line of conduct which I so steadily pursued, and to flatter myself that I had a vast control over my feelings, I became acquainted with Mr. Warren.

From the very first, I felt his influence over me, though I battled with my feelings, and drew back from his advances ; and I still cherished the hope that I should one day be worthy of Lynn.

I had many reckonings with my conscience ; and never had I so far given way to the impulse of loving Mr. Warren as I did on that night, when, with my head on Edith's pillow, I continued weeping, though more gently, as she went on to speak of our dear friend.

"But Oh, Annie," she suddenly exclaimed, "what have I done? I promised Mr. Warren faithfully to

say nothing of all this to you, and I have broken my word. How can I ever meet him again?"

"But he does not know how sad you are," she continued. Dear girl! her love and earnestness were irresistible.

"Neither does he know, my darling," I replied, "how fondly, how immeasurably, I love him."

"Annie, my sister, do I hear aright?" she exclaimed, with a look of surprise, in which pleasure was strongly blended. "Then, after all, it is as I wish, as I have prayed it might be; and you will let him come here, and claim your heart and hand."

Her whole countenance was lighted up by her gladness. There was something radiant in the expression of sisterly love that beamed on her face. So purified from self did she seem as she sat there before me, that for a moment I was drawn from the consideration of my own troubles to think of her.

"Let me write, dearest, and bid him come to us," she said. "Oh, Annie!" you are a happy girl!"

"On the contrary, I am most wretched," I replied; and a faintness crept over me as I spoke. "I am bound by a solemn promise never to be his."

At this moment our dear Ada entered, bringing, herself, a cup of warm tea for Edith. She looked dis-

tressed when she saw that my face was swollen from weeping ; and Edith was in such a state of excitement, that we both had to use our utmost endeavours to get her at all calm again.

" You girls will have your secrets, I see," said Ada, though what they can be, I cannot imagine, unless they are in some way connected with Mr. Warren ;" and the smile died on her lips when she said this, whilst she fixed on me a look of such earnest anxiety, that, in my consciousness, I turned from her.

" We must have no more talking to-night," she said ; so, after I had kissed Edith, she led me gently from the room.

Ada was very uneasy about my father. He could not employ himself in any way without a strange sort of excitement coming over him, and he was fretful and irritable as we never before remembered to have seen him.

The doctor went so far as to say that any conversation which deeply interested him must be avoided.

Ada told me all this to put me on my guard. He could not read, he could not write, and yet it was misery to him to be idle.

I think it was almost worse than the typhus fever to see him in this state ; but it was a consequence of that disease, which, indeed, had weakened him sadly.

He told me, with a smile of grateful love, that he should have died some weeks back, if he had had any other nurse than Ada.

## LIV.

I WAS very anxious to assist Ada in her daily care of my father; but of this she would not hear, though she said I might help her to amuse him as much as I liked.

It seemed quite out of place for me even to think of entertaining one who had ever been the life of our social parties, whose lively wit and fund of anecdote were so thought of amongst our friends and neighbours.

But we are at any time exposed to the inroads of illness; and just at one touch of disease, that intellect, which I had thought so strong, so steadfast, was reduced almost to that of a little child, with this difference only, that, whereas a child is light-hearted in its lack of knowledge, my poor father felt the change which he had no power to control, and became by turns melancholy and sorely irritable.

Here, then, was sorrow for Ada! The dark hour had fallen on her, and she met it serenely, nay, more, hopefully.

She was altogether above those common-place sort of people who talk boastingly of resignation, evincing, at the same time, an apathy, which it is painful to witness.

Perhaps she felt this peculiar kind of trial more keenly than any other; but I know she had the confidence that the Ruler of the storm was her Friend.

She had the composure of the child who, when questioned as to the cause of his calmness during the tempest, quietly replied, "My father's at the helm."

Ah, as yet I knew nothing of the reality of this confidence; but sorrow softens the heart, and prepares it for instruction.

Though I was reconciled to Ada, and felt the comfort of this in a thousand ways, I was still looking on the domestic life around me through a dark and distorted medium.

Things which had hitherto afforded me pleasure and amusement were now tasteless to me, and dark thoughts were tossing against each other in my mind, and chafing my spirit sadly. Could any one have looked within me, what confusion and misery would have met that glance, for I still smiled, and, without the slightest design of being hypocritical, generally retained my composure of manner.

Our education fosters this kind of deception, and, besides, the human heart is naturally inclined to conceal any deep-rooted sorrow.

My dear father and I would sit during the greater part of the morning engaged in light and easy conversation, whilst Ada went to look after household matters, which, in spite of all my care, she told me with a smile, had got a little put out during her absence.

One morning, I remember, that my father regretted very much Mr. Warren's absence, saying, "he was so well-informed, so active-minded, and agreeable, that there was quite a blank in the house without him. He was so attentive to me, too," he continued. "More than once I have fancied it must have been for Edith's sake, he so cared for me; but Ada says I am wrong, and that it is *somebody else* who had won his heart; and, upon my word," he added, looking stedfastly at me, "I believe she is right."

Women, after all, are the best judges in these matters; but there was so much whispering between him and Edith, that it was enough to puzzle any one.

A day or two ago, I should most energetically have refuted his assertions; but the half-confidence I had given Edith had soothed me wonderfully, and put my mind altogether in a different frame.

Yet the thought passed like a vivid pain through my mind, that when my father discovered my private marriage, which one day he assuredly would, how, on account of my evident preference for Mr. Warren, he would shrink from me, his own child, as a traitor, as one altogether unworthy of Lynn's noble heart.

But I went quietly on with my stitching, and in a very short time we were speaking of Ada. My father warmed up into enthusiastic gratitude, and then spoke of her with such touching tenderness, that it brought tears into my eyes.

I seconded, with all my heart, his praises of my step-mother; and I never saw any one more gratified than he was at this tribute to her goodness, though he well knew it was only what she deserved.

#### LV.

BUT Edith was not to be satisfied with the partial revelation I had made to her of my feelings; and, in truth, it was no easy matter to retrace my steps to the comfortless shore of my old reserve. Her sweet and anxious face lured me on; and, in the retirement of her little bed-room, she won from me the heavy secret of my rash and early marriage.



For a while she could not believe it; and when at last compelled to take it up as a truth, she dealt with it so tenderly, and delicately, and wisely, that she became dearer, far dearer to me than she had ever been through all the familiar years of our sisterhood.

She asked me, almost reproachfully, why I had borne the burden alone for so many years. "Oh, Annie," she said, "did you distrust my love? and yet I am sure you did not, but it was a great mistake."

Then, with her dear arms clasped round me, as we lay side by side, we went back into the past.

She touched slightly, and almost playfully, on my mother's strange fear of a successor, and on the curious and unwise plan she had adopted, in her love, to shield me from sorrow; and then we both agreed that, from many tokens which my father had unconsciously given us, my dear mother had been induced, when very young, to make what the French call, "*Un mariage de convenance*," and that my father was not the husband of her choice.

This naturally led us back again to the old subject; and we could only marvel that, with her experience, she should so have pressed me, in my thoughtlessness and childishness, to bind myself to one with whom I was utterly unacquainted.

It was long since I had slept so calmly as I did on that night. It needed little persuasion from Edith to induce me not to retire to my own room, and Ada "peeped in on us twice the next morning," she said, before she had the heart to awake us, so firmly were we locked in each other's arms.

I had given Edith such a new and strange subject to occupy her mind, that she was unusually silent and abstracted all day.

Ada connected her unusual and moody manner in a vague sort of way with Mr. Warren, and, to a certain extent, she was right.

"What are you and Edith plotting there in the embrasure of the old window?" she said, with a more cheerful laugh than I had heard from her for some time.

"It reminds me," she continued cheerfully, "what a steady old matron I have become, all unfit for your girlish confidence."

But my father's increased nervousness soon occupied all her attention, and, without any diminution of interest in us, she left us to chat away the morning.

Edith had no clear recollection of Lynn Forrester, and she made me tell her, over and over again, all that I remembered of him.

Of his light hair, and beardless boyish face, I had to speak ; of my fear and trembling in the little church, and of our mother's joy, when she found I was really Lynn's bride.

"But, as you know, Edith," I said, "this fatal marriage has been no kind of benefit to me. Where was Lynn when we lost our dear parent? and, Oh! where was he when Mr. Warren came and sought—yes, Edith, in his innocence sought—my love?"

"If I am cold in manner towards him,—if I have as yet resisted the temptation of giving him answering looks of love,—Oh, Edith! have I not sinned in spirit? Are not all my thoughts with him, and is he not mysteriously connected with every feeling of my heart, every circumstance of my life?"

But Edith could not, would not, look on the matter as dismally as I did.

A smile broke out on her face. "Nay, be of good heart, my dearest," she said: "the lost treasure will some day be found, and you must set at work all the determination within you to resist the influence of our dark-haired friend.

"By the way," she said, "you had better give me leave to set my cap at him, and then you shall have him as a brother."

She managed this attempt at raillery, however, very badly, for I could discern through it all the greatest anxiety.

"Oh, Edith," I exclaimed, "it is no laughing matter to me. If you take it so lightly, you will break my heart : you distress me beyond measure."

In a moment she was in tears. "My sister, my own dear Annie," she said, "I think of you all day, and I never lay my head on my pillow at night without praying for you. Before I knew your sorrow, I did this ; and now I ask that you may nobly win the victory in your great heart-struggle."

How truly she loved me ! In her delicate beauty, as she stood there, I felt, for a moment, that, with such a heart as hers in my possession, I ought not to care for any other love.

## LVI.

DR. SLAFFEN did not like many symptoms about Edith.

It vexed me a good deal at first when he hinted that she was, he feared, consumptive.

I did not like to admit the idea into my mind, and grew angry with him for having broached it.

"I am sure, Annie," he said, "no one is more

inclined to look trustfully and hopefully on the matter than I am ; but we must not wilfully blind ourselves, and, when the bandage falls from our eyes, marvel at the danger on our way. No, no ; a little prudence and timely care may be crowned with the happiest results."

"But what would you do—what would you recommend, dear Dr. Slaffen ?" I said, alarmed at the serious view he took of her state of health.

"Well, then," he replied, with a great deal more energy than he usually manifested, "this is my plan:—

"You see spring is growing weary of her buds and unfolded leaves, and is giving them up to summer to expand and perfect.

"It is just the very time when a continental tour would be, of all others, the most bewitching thing.

"For my own part, I wouldn't stay in this surly climate, when I could help it, for all the sunshine which it gives so grudgingly even in summer.

"I am off to Germany next month, where my boys meet me, and go on with me to Switzerland.

"Now, as Mr. and Mrs. Hall accompany me, why not let us pack that slight sister of yours into our travelling carriage ?

"Why, my dear, it will restore her health, perhaps save her life, to roam with us amongst those glorious

mountains, and to find Alpine flowers, like love in sorrow, gemming the rugged precipices where hardier plants had withered and died."

The doctor had grown enthusiastic whilst speaking. I had often thought, and now I felt convinced, there was poetry in him in spite of his unromantic appearance.

Indeed, there is perhaps no human heart without the germ of what we call poetry, though in some it is never cleared from the rubbish and dust of the earth which conceal it.

Dr. Slaffen's warm, kind heart would, I am sure, have made any sacrifice for Edith's good.

"It will be an excellent arrangement, Dr. Slaffen," I said.

"I will go and talk the matter over to Ada; and what a surprise it will be to Edith to hear that we have all determined on her departure!"

And so everything was soon settled; and before the summer foliage was in its maturity, Edith had set off on her tour, and Mr. and Mrs. Hall and Dr. Slaffen were her companions.

She left us in excellent spirits, whispering to me as we parted that she had not forgiven me for so long keeping my secret from her; and then she added, very

playfully, that she would try her best in some way or other to be revenged on me.

At first, I felt Edith's absence to be a great trial. It seemed to add tenfold to the weight of my heavy secret.

Ada did all she could to cheer me, and I regularly took my turn in reading to my father, and trying to amuse him.

Our letters from the dear traveller were very satisfactory, and the charm of novelty alone invested them with peculiar interest.

Edith had never before been so far separated from me, and there seemed something strange in her telling me of persons I knew not, in her description of places I had never seen.

## LVII.

"DR. SLAFFEN'S sons have joined us," she wrote,—  
"pleasant, fashionable young men.

"The eldest is very interesting in appearance, and highly intellectual, without any of the quaintness of his father. Our good friend Dr. Slaffen is kinder than ever to me.

"I cannot tell you, Annie, how proud I am of being his favourite; and though this sometimes excludes me

from the companionship of his sons,—for he scarcely ever lets me take any other arm than his,—yet it procures for me many advantages.

“Mrs. Hall is happy, and comfortable, and contented everywhere, keeping, as usual, on the bright side of life : she does not recognise as annoyances those little difficulties which so distress other lady-travellers. She always has a smile for us ; and sometimes, at night, after a fatiguing day, she has surprised me by quietly and indefatigably knitting,—yes, Annie, knitting, when the strongest of our party were lounging about almost exhausted.

“I have ceased now to wonder at this her perpetual occupation, for Dr. Slaffen says, ‘the exercise of her fingers is a necessary safety-valve for certain fidgety feelings, which would otherwise render her society less agreeable, and that it is as necessary to her as respiration.’

“As for the names of places, she is further from them than ever ; but Mr. Hall says, ‘this does not in the least matter, as she is not our guide.’

“Yesterday we arrived at Chamouni, which lies in the heart of Switzerland’s grandeur and glory.

The climate is bracing and delightful. As I sit writing to you, I hear the music of brooks and water-



falls ; the wind is whispering to the leaves, and the tinkling of bells is wafted to me from flocks which range the mountain-sides.

“ Yesterday we went to the *Mer-de-Glace*. I thought our guides—and we had many of them—an interesting set of people.

“ They are hardy and energetic ; and what pleases me most in them is, that they do not go through what is required of them in the business-like, not-caring-sort-of-way, I had expected.

“ Some of them are enthusiastically alive to the beautiful, accustomed as they are to these scenes of grandeur ; and then it gratifies me not a little to observe how the most knowing of our party look up to them for information ; for they know each mountain-nook ; they can trace the path of the avalanche ; and the lowest murmur of the wind, so mysterious to us, is intelligible to them, warning them of the approaching storm ; and the rivers tell them, as they pass, what is going on in the land of ice above.

“ Dr. Slaffen made us all laugh by saying, that ‘ we did not need his diagrams to prove we could never be independent of each other : these hardy and, in many respects, ignorant mountaineers,’ he said, ‘ taught us that.’

“ Oh, how pleasant it was, going through the meadows in the Vale of Chamouni ! Then we crossed the furious Arne, and bravely ascended the woods of firs till we came to Montanvert.

“ On what scenery we looked down ! How can I describe it to you ?

“ What contrast, what variety met our view !

“ As you stand there, you can see Chamouni's green valley, its hamlet, fields, and gardens ; and these beam on you like encouraging smiles, before you turn to look at the cataract of ice—stiffened billows, stretching out to the far horizon.

“ From the bosom of this icy view, enormous granite pillars tower to the very skies. They stand there in stupendous and desolate beauty.

“ Will you believe me, Annie, when I tell you that, in the very heart of this frozen sea, there is a living flower-garden, where the rhododendron, prettily called the ‘ Rose of the Alps,’ flourishes in its hardy beauty ?

“ The bees from Chamouni resort there in thousands for honey, lured by the sweet breath of these beautiful flowers ; so you see that the fragrance they give to the congregated snows of a thousand winters is not altogether wasted.

“ There are slopes of pasturage at the base of these

granite pinnacles, and once every year the Alpine herdsmen drive their flocks there for pasturage.

"Our guide told us the way is so dangerous, that a vast number of men, women, and children go annually to Montanvert to view these flocks crossing the glaciers.

"The peasants seem a fearless set. I have observed that not only are the women continually engaged in knitting, but that the nobler sex sometimes occupy themselves with this work.

"Tell Ada this, for I know she loves better to hear about animate than inanimate nature. Tell her, too, that we went into one of the chalets, and were regaled with black bread and milk and strawberries by two peasant girls.

"Dr. Slaffen called one the 'Rose of the Alps;' and though she did not know a word of English, I could see from her manner that she understood the compliment.

"Our little party is a very delightful one, and though I have been sadly fatigued, I am now recovering myself wonderfully.

"Perhaps you will be surprised when I say that I never felt so happy in my life before, and yet I am so far distant from you. I cannot understand it. Help me to unravel the mystery.

"Are my senses congealed through the influence of

the ice around me? And yet this cannot be; too great is my sense of gratitude.

"Only think, Mr. Warren joined our party quite unexpectedly early this morning, looking somewhat pale and haggard; but he says this is my fancy, for that every one is complimenting him on his good looks."

### LVIII.

It was well that this little piece of intelligence came at the end of the letter. Had it been otherwise, she might as well have been in the Tropics as amongst ice-crowned mountains, so far as I was concerned.

Was it possible that this strange joy of which Edith spoke was caused by Mr. Warren's arrival?

And what if she were glad to see him? "Oh, Annie, Annie!" I said to myself, "your very distress at this thought is proof positive that you are no longer in heart true to Lynn Forrester.

My reflections were anything but consolatory, and I used a great deal of sophistry in my reasonings with myself.

I felt I had become grave and sullen, and quite unlike my natural self. I tried to account for this by the anxiety I experienced for my sister's health, by

my depression of spirits at her absence ; but it would not do. A voice rose up from the depths of my bosom, and said, " Oh, Annie ! your sisterly love is all very good in its way, but it is not for Edith you are grieving now ;" and, discontented and angry with myself, I became more sullen than ever.

My father spoke to me more than once on my troubled and impatient manner.

" It is a bad sign," he said, " when a girl cannot bear to be told she is wrong without exhibiting symptoms of restlessness. I have heard of the meekness of wisdom ; and depend upon it, my child, it is only folly that cannot shake hands with rebuke."

But it was very hard to sit quietly and hear him say that I must expect to find alloy in the world's pleasure. It was very trying to remain silent when he told me that mine was a favoured lot ; and I could not help thinking that if he were thus mistaken with regard to his own child, with whom he lived in daily and familiar intercourse, how I might be deceived with regard to my friends and neighbours ; and I drew a sickly sort of satisfaction from the idea, that some of them might be almost as sorrowful as I.

Ada saw plainly that I was out of sorts, that I could not get on even with common needle-work.

She did not question me by words ; but when I was very fretful, she looked at me in an earnest, anxious way, that sometimes filled my heart with sudden remorse for my petulant conduct, and at other times made me feel miserable from the reflection that my cruel secret shut me out from her sweet sympathy.

How could there be anything like real confidence between us ?

I could not even meet her half way in her attempt to probe my sorrow, so that her own innate delicacy sent her back again to the spot from which she had started, and I sometimes feared she would attribute my unavoidable reserve to coldness of heart.

Autumn advanced, and scattered leaves around, which the wind, in a frolic, took high up into the air, to send down again in a shower on us as we walked in the old elm avenue.

How I trembled when Edith's well-known letters arrived, longing, yet fearing, to open them !

Ada rallied me on my agitation, but I begged her not to take any notice of this before my father, as, if she did, I should be unable to read the letter calmly.

I thought she looked distressed and uneasy for a moment, and she desisted from this kind of badinage ever after, whilst her concern for me increased ; and

from that day, I am sure, she viewed my altered manner in a more serious light than ever.

Yet I had many things to alleviate my trouble, heavy as it was,—a sister, though absent, making my cares her own, willing, nay, anxious, to be all that a sister could be to me.

I could acknowledge this in a general way, and feel a vague sort of thankfulness for these daily blessings ; but I never allowed my sense of them to assuage my repinings, or hush the murmurs, which, like waters from a troubled fount, were continually welling up within me.

Many a true word my father spoke, in spite of the nervous disorder which hung so heavily upon him.

“ We are willing enough to enumerate our troubles,” he said ; “ and even if we have the grace not to lay them before others, we can count them over pretty frequently to ourselves ; but there is not often a reckoning of our mercies, though they be new every morning.”

“ Like Mrs. Masterman,” I said, smiling, “ telling us only of her ‘ sad reverses ! ’ ”

“ Ah, that is the example,” my father quickly replied, “ of those who betray their thoughts by words ; though I do think that old lady’s reverses rest more heavily on her lips than on her heart ; but can we find

no example of one brooding over trouble in silence, and keeping no memory in her heart of blessings, numerous as sands on the sea shore ?”

My father looked knowingly at me as he spoke. I quailed under his rebuke, and hung down my head in shame; but he was not angry, for he passed his hand across my brow, and said, with something of his old cheerfulness,—

“ O wud some power the giftie gie us,  
To see oursels as ithers see us !”

### LIX.

We had again a most interesting letter from Edith.

Ah, how could her letters fail to be interesting to me, putting all thought of herself out of the question ; for was not his dear name on the pages ? Thus, she ran on :—

“ We have been passing through ice and snow, along the very brink of frowning precipices, and crossing torrents, which it would make you home-stayers shudder to look at. We have been ascending steepes, the very account of which would, a little while ago, have filled my heart with fear.



"I am so much stronger, dear Annie, that I am a wonder to myself. Dr. Slaffen is kinder than ever, and many a pleasant conversation we have together: he is so well informed, that even Mr. Warren dims in his light. But do not think, because I say this, that I have lost one particle of my sisterly affection for him: no, Annie, he is dear to me as any brother could be. Indeed, I don't know what I should have done without him, during our climb up the mountain; for I could tell him all the fears which I was ashamed to own to any one else; and right glad was I when, from the Alpine side, the Hospice of the Grand St. Bernard beamed on us,—a gem of mercy on the rugged bosom of danger.

"A thousand dreams of childhood floated through my mind as I first gazed on it,—winter evening stories to which we listened at the nursery hearth.

"There are no trees round it, not even a shrub to be seen; but nature, unwilling to leave the place altogether desolate, scatters here and there patches of grass and moss, from which, as by a sudden impulse, sweet bright flowers spring up and smile.

"I saw the dogs, Annie, the very dogs of which our nursery tales gave us such thrilling accounts; the noble, dreadful dogs, alive and real, and barking furiously in a deep tone.

"They are thinner, and not so picturesque as represented in our engravings; and this must, I think, be the effect of the withering climate in which they live.

"Good creatures! they keep watch bravely all the summer, and in the winter excel man in works of mercy.

"The Monks there are gentle and pleasant in manner, but they remain at the Hospice only a few years, and are then replaced by another set, as the keenness of the climate, when long endured, is very destructive to health.

"At first, I thought the very idleness in which they lived in those solitudes must be oppressive; but a chapel adjoins the Hospice; and what with attending to masses and prayers, or, I should rather say, repetitions and incense-wavings, they contrive to pass away the hours.

"Some of them, however, are really studious, and have amassed an immense degree of knowledge.

"A cheerful wood fire burns in the great hall, and there are very tolerable bed-rooms for travellers.

"The sight of the Morgue, attached to the Hospice, is most depressing. You look in through an iron-grated window, and, with light just making the darkness more fearfully visible, you see the dead bodies of those who were lost on the mountains in a state of horrible pre-

servation, embalmed by the cold, and standing there in a strange mockery of life and death.

"Dreading to look in, yet by an irresistible impulse compelled to do so, I saw a mother, with her babe in her arms, just in the very position in which she had been discovered in the snows. She was pressing the little creature to her bosom; and it seemed to me as if death could not make up his mind to give the beautiful forms he had taken to corruption, and so set them there as a record of maternal love.

"I wish I had left the window, Annie, with this scene pictured on my mind; but I turned to the right, and there was a dreadful man standing against the wall, with his face hard and black, and his teeth clenched, as if in agony. I wish I had never seen it. That fearful face haunts my dreams, and has followed me into the sunny city D'Aosta, where we now are.

"The walnut-trees are beautiful, and the chestnuts so green, I can scarcely fancy that but a very short time has passed since we were in wintry coldness.

"I think, Annie, we are the happiest travelling party that ever was.

"Even Dr. Slaffen's diagrams, which used to try our patience sometimes, have taken up a new character, and positively amuse us.

"I must confess, I do not think Mr. Warren is as happy as I am, and sometimes I feel as if I were heartless and selfish so to enjoy myself ; only with my new gladness of spirit, a deep sympathy seems to have risen up in my heart for you both.

"I can hardly understand my own feelings, and yet something within me compels me to bid you hope, though your perplexities and sorrows appear to be those on which hope is least likely to smile ; but God made a path for the Israelites through the surging sea, and He will yet make a way for you to be happy."

## LX.

I GLANCED over the latter part of this letter in silence ; but we were so accustomed to abridge and omit in our readings to my father, that Ada did not take much notice of it ; if she did, she was unwilling to let me perceive it.

My father talked of the benefit that this change of scene would be to Edith ; "and next time, Annie," he said, "it will be your turn to leave us, for your cheeks are so pale and sunken, it grieves me to look at you, especially," he added, in a quick way, "when I feel how heavily your strength is taxed for me ; for though

Ada is my slave,"—and he put his arm round her neck as he spoke,—(she was sitting by him,)—"you, too, have your share of servitude.

"Don't interrupt me," he said, in a kind of earnest playfulness, when I attempted to speak: "though selfishness has, I am afraid, to a certain extent, got the upper hand of me, I am not yet so blinded by it, as to be unable to see my own failings. Are not you both running after one thing and another for me all day? and when I have everything that love can do for me, am not I restless and dissatisfied, and" — ; but Ada would not let him go on. She told him how happy she was in having him to attend to; how she had rather watch and wait amidst the embers of hope deferred with him, than revel in the sunshine of prosperity with any other.

It seemed a pleasure and a comfort to my father to hear her say this, even whilst he chid her, and bade her hold her tongue; but she did not heed in the least his prohibition; and, turning towards me with a look of animated tenderness, she said, "We are such sisters, now that anxiety itself steals more gently on me than formerly."

I had drawn my chair close to my father's side, and I sat there with Edith's letter in my hand, trying to

throw the weight from my heart, and to leave selfish thoughts alone, whilst I strove to cheer him.

We began to talk of mountains and snows, and very terrible things Ada told us,—of avalanches overwhelming thousands; of an infant who lived a whole week in the snows without any sustenance; all which tales she had received as truth from her uncle, who was a sailor. But just as she came to the crisis of one of her tales, we found my father sleeping, so we left off talking, and Ada sat there wrapped in such sweet serious composure, that, as I looked at her, I could not help feeling I would have given worlds to possess some of it.

But the twilight deepened, and so did the shadows of my heart.

“Ah,” I thought, as I sat there, “Edith may mention Dr. Slaffen merely as a blind, and her thoughts may be all the time with Mr. Warren;” then, half ashamed of entertaining so hard a thought of my kind sister, I endeavoured to soften it by trying to persuade myself that, out of consideration for my feelings, she might be unwilling to let me know how entirely Mr. Warren occupied her thoughts, as if deception in this matter would not, under any circumstances, have been wrong. But our judgment becomes distorted, and our

ideas strangely perverted, by trouble, especially when it is locked up in our bosoms, and we unfold it neither to man nor to God.

This was my case. How my heart chafed and fretted in my breast, no one knew ; but Ada was watching me with an eye of love and pity, and, after all, received the revelation of my trouble in a way over which I had neither power nor control.

Indeed,—though, perhaps, it is no business of mine to say so,—my step-mother was wonderfully improved by her continued association with my father.

His mind, till illness dimmed it, had been of such a healthful cast, his feelings were so refined, and the expression of his thoughts was always so tasteful, that it was impossible for any one, particularly if of ready understanding, to be much with him, and not take something of his turn of mind.

As Ada conversed, I could not help noticing many of my father's favourite expressions, although they came forth in the garb of womanly tenderness ; and there was an impressiveness in her way of relating an anecdote, which, I am sure, she had unconsciously derived from him ; for, in her girlhood, gentle and pleasing as she had ever been, she never had the mastery over language and thought which she now possessed.

If woman can soften and refine man, how much can man strengthen and improve the mind of woman !

Sometimes, when Ada touched on anything humorous, my father would laugh, and then, when she feared exciting him too much, and dropped into the pathetic, I have seen the tears stealing down his cheeks, and I thought this might be quite as bad for him as merriment.

## LXI.

MY father continued sleeping.

I am sure that Ada and I, though we did not acknowledge it to each other, were always more sensible of our fatigue when we ceased from our efforts to amuse him.

I had a thousand disagreeable reflections always ready to rise up and distress me whenever I ceased from active employment, and Mr. Warren held a prominent part in these doleful musings.

My warmest thoughts were his,—my most ardent feelings engaged in his behalf, had become, as it were, entangled in sin.

As I sat there in the flickering light of the dim lamp, how I wished I had never entered into the unwise con-



tract of that hateful early marriage with Lynn Forrester !

And yet I felt his noble forbearance, and appreciated it deeply. I was unworthy of him, I knew,—Oh, how unworthy ! I grew discontented and angry with myself, and yet could make no satisfactory arrangement with my conscience.

If Edith should learn to love Mr. Warren,—and after all it would be harmless enough if she did,—how could I bear it ? for he might then transfer those affections to her which I had apparently disregarded.

Then I looked at Ada, sitting by my father, resting her head on her arm. Sadness had stolen over her fine face, and I thought of the dark cloud that lowered on her married life ; for though her sorrow was legitimate, it was sorrow still.

How tenderly she loved my father, perhaps no one knew as well as I ; but then she could sit by him and watch him, and she had the consolation of feeling how much she was to him ; and all these circumstances, I determined in my mind, were great alleviations of her trouble.

Then my thoughts passed more slowly through my mind : I grew confused, and sleep came forward, and led me into the land of dreams. Ah, what a slumber that was for me, and how much truth there is in the old

axiom, that important results often spring from the most trifling causes! Had it not been for those dreams, how much of Ada's love and sympathy would have been denied me!

I must have been very restless whilst sleeping, for when I awoke, which I did with a start, I found Ada kneeling before me, with her hands gently placed on my knees, looking as anxiously at me as she had looked at my father a short time before.

"What a troubled sleep you have had!" she said, "talking till you quite alarmed me."

"The chair is narrow, and rather upright," I replied, "which, no doubt, made me a little fidgety; but you must not be uneasy. I shall soon, I trust, be sleeping soundly in my own little bed."

"Poor Annie!" she said, not noticing my remark: "no marvel you have looked so care-worn lately. You have told me in your sleep," she added, in a very low voice, "of your love for Mr. Warren."

"Nay, dearest, don't look so pale and scared," she continued; "there is no great crime in such an attachment." Though she said this, she was scarcely more composed than I. "There must be, I am afraid, some truth in what you murmured."

I turned pale and cold, and the temptation came on

me to tell her I had been dreaming I was married ; but I resisted it, and remained silent.

" You said," continued Ada, "' Oh, why did my mother persuade me to marry Lynn ? ' "

Still, I looked at her kneeling before me, in her love and pity, but I was spell-bound into silence.

" You said, dear Annie," she continued, "' Oh, misery, misery,—that marriage tie ! ' " Still, I was speechless, and continued gazing on her.

The cold perspiration stood on my temples, and I thought I should have fainted.

" Pardon me, Annie," Ada said, sorrowfully, " if I have wounded your feelings ; but tell me, are you married ? "

" Yes," I said, frightened to trembling at the sound of the little word which my lips had framed.

" My mother, in her great love for me, persuaded me to marry Lynn Forrester when I was scarcely fifteen years of age. We quarrelled shortly after the ceremony, and poor Lynn, in the resolution of his high-mindedness, left our home, regretting, I am sure, very bitterly, the rash step he had taken, in placing a wayward and undisciplined child between him and all future chance of happiness."

" Hush, hush," said Ada, looking round at my father,

who was still sleeping ; it would kill him to hear this in his present state. But her whole heart of sympathy shone out in her eyes as she said, " Poor Annie ! "

A relief fell on my spirit when I had made this confession, which it is impossible to describe.

We spoke in very low whispers ; but I told her of my marriage in the little church, of my fear and discomfort when I found I was really a child-wife, and of the misery that took the place of fear in my heart after my mother died, and I was left to bear my secret alone.

" Poor Annie ! " she said again, and this was all. But how much sympathy was expressed in the tone, it is impossible to describe.

## LXII.

HAVING fairly told Ada that it was through my dear mother's persuasion I had entered into this imprudent marriage, I found myself compelled to make known to her the fear my poor mamma ever had of her place being occupied by a step-mother.

It was a delicate subject on which to touch ; and, though I tried to wield the matter skilfully, I fear I did not manage it well, for Ada wept bitterly. She

wept, but there was nothing like resentment or anger in her manner towards me.

At length, mastering, in a great measure, her emotion, she said,—

“And you received me, Annie, feeling what a price you had paid to shield off such intrusion; you received me, feeling it could be the old home no more, and every clank of your own marriage chain on your heart,”—she lowered her voice very much as she said this,—“every recollection of the dreadful tie that bound you, must have sent you, with a shudder, yet further and further from me.”

She did not turn her face away from me for a moment, but, looking at me in her openness and innocence, said,—

“Was it not so, Annie?”

“God forgive me, Ada,” I replied; “but, at first, I shrunk from your very smile.

“Could I have found Lynn Forrester, I think, in my madness, I would have flown to him, simply to have been freed from your presence; and what misery might have been mine, had I thus rashly presented myself to him!

“As yet, though he has kept from me, and nobly given me all the freedom he could, he has not positively rejected me; and were it not for my increasing

feeling of attachment towards Mr. Warren, I should hope to be one day worthy of my husband. This is the plague-spot," I said, "that breaks out on all my resolutions of amendment; yet, in spite of all this, I have my dreams of hope, a strong persuasion, that the day will surely come when Lynn, in his great-mindedness, will pity and forgive this dire heart-struggle, and, doing so, own me as his bride."

How strengthening was Ada's reply! "It is God who has placed this hope in your bosom, and He will not disappoint you: though the *blessing tarry*, wait for it."

"But, my darling Ada," I continued, "in my selfishness, I have run away from the subject.

"It is of you, of your goodness and greatness, that I would speak, Ada. Let me tell you how your forbearance made me feel, long before I had courage to acknowledge it, my own unworthiness; and when I saw your kind and loving spirit shining forth as gold by my father's side, during the dark night of his suffering, which fell so heavily upon us, I was convinced that a step-mother, with gentleness on her lips, and God's grace in her heart, could be of priceless value in a home like ours."

At first, Ada was so much overcome, that she answered me only by tears. By degrees, however, though we had

gone on far into the night sitting before that clear, red fire, we both grew calm ; Ada assuring me frequently, with a grave earnestness of manner, amounting almost to sadness, that she felt more than ever called on to cheer and encourage me, as she had, to a certain extent, been the cause of the step I had taken.

That she thought very seriously of my marriage, I could easily see : there was something in her very manner of speaking which told me this ; and, in truth, it was no trifling step I had taken.

Dear Ada ! as she sat there in the flickering light, there was so much seriousness in her face, such a look of pensive thought round her lips, that I felt angry with myself for having given her an additional load of anxiety.

I had little sleep that night ; but the next day it so happened that my father was much better, and he seemed all at once to have taken a fancy to be left by himself, so that Ada and I had a great deal of time for conversation touching my extraordinary position.

She promised to ask my father if he knew where Lynn was ; for though he had been altogether my mother's acquaintance, and, to the best of my recollection, my father had never seen him, yet he was acquainted with Lynn's family, and might, I had no doubt, be able to

give us some clue by which we might eventually discover my husband's hiding-place.

## LXIII.

ADA told me to cast my care on God. He had been her refuge when the waves of trouble were very high. She told me how her life had been darkened by my father's illness. "Indeed, Annie," she said, "I don't know what would have become of me, had it not been for the recollection of that eternal home where neither suffering nor death is permitted to enter.

"Oh! he was too dear to me," she continued, and the tears chased each other down her cheeks. "Into my thoughts, my studies, my prayers, he entered; and by this chastening, I am reminded"—a vivid blush mantled on her cheek—"that he had become my idol."

Never did my conscience more loudly accuse me of selfishness than at this moment.

I had been so occupied by my own grievances, that, although from day to day I had watched her pale cheek as she sat by my father's side, I had never considered how rugged the path of life had become to her, how, as it were, the shadow of death rested on a future, a little while ago so radiant in promise.



Her patience, her faith, how beautiful they were! and her hope, which, though sometimes for a little time dimmed, but never extinguished, brightened over her darkest moments.

Even now, sadness lingers round the reflection, that I lived in this healthful, holy atmosphere so long, uninfluenced and unimproved.

"You must not reproach yourself in this way, dear Ada," I said. "God meant you to love my father. He gave you the very feelings which in your nervousness and distress you condemn as sinful. It would not be well if your love were less."

But she was just in that state of mind which seems to draw something like comfort from self-accusation.

"Annie," she said, weeping, "you do not know how much he has engrossed my every thought: he has had even those which should have been given to God alone."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed, stopping her words with a kiss; you have only been doing your duty, and thus fulfilling the law of God.

"Did you not tell me only yesterday, that whom God loved he chastened?"

She smiled sorrowfully, shook her head, and kept her eyes fixed on the leaping flames; for the autumn even-

ings were cold, and we had insensibly drawn very near to the large old grate.

After all, Ada would have her own way, and I could not alter her opinion, that my father's illness was sent as a punishment to her for having loved him too much.

I have often observed that minds, apparently well fortified by strong sense, have here and there loop-holes in the barrier, through which sundry weaknesses steal in; and it is on this account that we find people of sense and intelligence occasionally bigoted, and holding principles at variance with their usual discrimination and judgment.

I thought, if I had my prejudices, Ada had her's, too; but they were so steeped in humility, that they bore a more amiable character than mine.

As we continued to converse, Ada glided on into a sort of chastened hopefulness, as if she knew that God was still her Friend, and that the sun would, eventually, break through the clouds.

Dear Ada! she could think very leniently of me, but was a hard judge of herself; and because she could not condemn herself for any gross or flagrant vices, it seemed to me she was ingeniously contriving to create a fault out of the very sweetest of all virtues.

## LXIV.

ANOTHER letter from Edith arrived, which made me very busy with thought.

"There are heavy clouds round Mont Blanc," she said; "but I think this only adds to its beauty; indeed, I am half inclined to fancy they are essential to its grandeur and magnificence. You know very well, Annie, that none of us appear to advantage till the shadow of sorrow has, in some measure, rested on us."

I was alone with Ada in the library, reading my letter aloud, so, in my new confidence, I spoke out my thoughts.

"It is all very well," I said, "for Edith to write in this way, with the beautiful about her, and happiness melting in her heart. It is very well, on a bed of roses, to talk of the beauty of thistles."

"Hush, hush," answered Ada, sweetly; "your father has often remarked, that, if we are not on our guard, when sorrow enters our hearts, bitterness of spirit comes in, too, through the door that grief opened. Wait and hope, dear Annie: these must be your watch-words." Then, without discontinuing her work, she

sang sweetly and prettily these lines from Bishop Heber's Hymn :—

“God, when thy sorrows visit us,  
Oh, send thy patience too !”

“You would not, I am sure,” she continued, with melody still hanging on her voice, “wish your sister to be less happy.”

The spirit of murmuring, if encouraged, insensibly encroaches on every better feeling ; and when we yield to it, we know not what manner of spirit we are of.

I sighed when I thought that, if Edith's happiness were caused by association with Mr. Warren, I could not rejoice in her gladness.

But I continued the letter :—

“A happy week we have had at D'Aosta. It is not far from the country of the Waldenses. It is a lovely place, and some charming walks we have taken.

“So far from you and home, my sweet sister, I cannot at all comprehend how I contrive to be so happy. Such delightful rambles we have in the fields, and along the margin of the river !

“D'Aosta is beautifully situated in a valley, of whose richness I cannot give you any idea. Mont Blanc,

and old St. Bernard, are its hoary guardians. The inhabitants are chiefly French, and Roman Catholics, and very unhealthy looking, most of them being disfigured with the goitre; and, still more than this, many of them are idiots. It makes me sad to look at their pale, emaciated faces.

"Dr. Slaffen tells me that men of science have vainly attempted to arrest the progress of this disease. It cannot be caused by want of cleanliness, because many places, by no means equal to D'Aosta in this respect, are free from it.

"A pure mountain-stream runs through its streets; the air is delicious and balmy, and I long to be able to send you some of the strawberries and cream which we always have at breakfast.

"They compliment me, Annie, on the roses of my cheeks. Mr. Warren compares their tint to the hues of the morning on the snows." What a leap my heart gave within me, as I read this! "And Dr. Slaffen had the sauciness to tell me, 'he strongly suspected he had some little power over their depth of colour;' and would you believe, that, as he said this, they felt as if they had suddenly become red-hot? but then it was only because Mr. Warren was looking at me."

Was Edith only trying to torture me when she said all this? What *could* she mean?

At one time she positively spoke disparagingly of Mr. Warren, and even set up prosy old Dr. Slaffen as his superior. This was hard to bear, but more painful still it was to cherish the suspicion, even for a moment, that she thought of Mr. Warren with affection—with love.

“Ada,” I exclaimed, “a dreadful fear has passed through my mind. Perhaps Edith is in love with that old fellow Dr. Slaffen.” My suspicion about Mr. Warren I was ashamed to mention even to her.

“The doctor is all very good in his way, but assuredly more fit for a grandfather than a husband to Edith.”

“You must not settle the matter so quickly,” she replied, with a smile. “It is but natural that she should feel almost a daughter’s love for Dr. Slaffen.”

I answered her petulantly, and told her she did not understand half as well as I did Edith’s enthusiastic nature, and how she would sacrifice the whole happiness of her life in gratitude to Dr. Slaffen, for nothing more than the common kindness of a friend.

I remember I worked myself up into what my father called a *temper*; and a considerable degree of stormy satisfaction I felt in showering many ungratious epithets

on the good doctor, who fortunately was beyond the reach of my arrowy words.

What right had he to tamper with Edith's young heart ?

I hoped, if she married him, she would break *his*, that I did ; and so contradictory, so incomprehensible is human nature, that the more vehement I grew in my abuse of the good doctor, the stronger grew my hope that Edith's love was not given to Mr. Warren.

## LXV.

ALL this time Ada was sitting before the fire with the poker in her hand, playing with the coals. Sometimes she had smiled ; and at other times had turned on me a look so full of mingled love and pity, that I envied the bosom capable of holding so much sweet tenderness.

" Oh, Ada," I said, " I know it is very wrong to rattle on in this way ; and I often wonder how you, with your hopes blighted, looking forward, as I sometimes fear you do, to months of watching and waiting in that hope deferred, which makes the heart sick,—I often wonder that you can bear up as you do, and even comfort others."

" Because," she replied, with a slight effort at com-

posure, "He who gives the suffering has given me His patience too; and I want you, in your anxiety, to rest, not only on a vague sense of God's goodness, but to try and hope, and even to feel persuaded, that He who does not willingly afflict, will, in His own good time, chase away the clouds from your life."

A strange trembling thrill passed through me as she spoke.

Here was a new thought for me. I was to feel that not only would God strengthen me to bear sorrow, and cheer me during my spirit-darkness, but that, if I rested confidently on Him, He would, in His own time, which must be the best time, disperse the gloom.

Still I was perverse, and unreasonable. "How could I ever be happy again?" I said, moodily. "The simple weight of my secret on my heart was bad enough before I knew Mr. Warren, but now, though my sorrow has been revealed to you, Ada, and I have received the relief of your dear sympathy, I am still at the mercy of a thousand apprehensions which are rioting about my heart, chafing and wounding it in every corner.

"Sometimes I fancy that Mr. Warren has learned to love Edith; and though perhaps I ought to find pleasure in the thought, the very supposition sets my brain on fire."



"And all this," Ada replied, "because you have not learned to feel that, though weeping may endure for a night, joy will assuredly come in the morning."

Whilst thus eagerly conversing, I had been twisting Edith's letter into various shapes, and it was Ada who reminded me that I had not finished it.

There were only, however, a few lines more, and these were crossed over the last page.

Mr. Warren, she said, had told her that D'Aosta was the birthplace of Calvin. "There is a strange story current amongst the people," she continued. "They say he fled from the city because he failed in the attempt to raise a dead man to life.

"His flight took place at eleven o'clock; and ever since that time the people of the town have made that hour their mid-day, considering eleven o'clock as noon.

Mr. Warren declares, however, that the story is false, that no miracle-working enthusiasm was mixed with Calvin's clear but logical mind.

At any other time all this discussion would have interested me very much; but I sullenly put the letter into my pocket, and began watching the red flames till darkness had gained the mastery over the lingering grey of twilight, wondering, and being angry with myself for the wonder, if Edith could so far play the hypocrite, as

to make more than usual mention of Dr. Slaffen, only to disguise her increasing affection for Mr. Warren.

But the severest reflection of all was, that of my utter faithlessness in heart to Lynn Forrester, my high-minded, self-sacrificing husband. All my kindly thoughts towards Mr. Warren were so many sins, for which I despised myself. But how, Oh! how could Lynn leave me thus? Too cruelly had he punished me for my girlish waywardness; but to meet now, that would never do. I should shrink from him in shame and fear.

Into what a maze of difficulty we are led, when we follow the guidings of impulse! My preference for Mr. Warren I had from the first felt to be wrong, but I had not struggled against it, nor had I, when the temptation stood darkly before me, sought from God the strength to resist it.

That evening, however, we entered into an animated discussion on Calvin's character, my father contending that there was a great deal of intolerance in his views of Christianity; and my step-mother gently pleaded that, though warped and misguided, it was zeal still.

We touched on the spirit of animosity pervading those times, which influenced both Protestants and Roman Catholics; and Ada sweetly remarked that we were all too apt to forget, in our impetuosity, that the

very elements of true and undefiled religion were forbearance and love.

My father spoke almost with the animation of old times.

I observed, too, about him, a great deal of his petting, playful way; and I could not help fancying that these were harbingers of returning health.

"I have always endeavoured," he said, "to meet Christianity on its own broad basis,—‘peace and goodwill to man,’ remembering that the proclamation of these blessings was not confined to any sect or party whatever."

#### LXVI.

I REFLECTED, again and again, on what Ada had told me, and, as I did so, I grew more hopeful. Frequently I said to myself, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning," as if, by so doing, I could press into my heart a sense of happiness.

But there was perplexity in my very search for consolation.

The only way in which I could be freed from my present misery was by the death of Lynn Forrester, the very thought of which was most painful to me; for as

the African carries the charm on his bosom, and feels no harm can come to him whilst it remains there, so thoughts of Lynn's generosity and nobleness of mind were for ever with me as a talisman ; and though I sometimes feared, with regret indescribable, that, by my partiality for Mr. Warren, I had proved myself altogether unworthy of my husband, still it was a safeguard to me,—the high opinion I had formed of Lynn ; and even when Mr. Warren's influence was upon me, there sometimes rushed through my heart, like a breath of invigorating air, the sacred recollection of my husband, and in the very name were a power and a spell.

But, with all these thoughts at work within me, I grew restless and impatient, and from having been a placid-tempered and light-hearted girl, became morose and easily irritated.

My father observed this with real pain, for he was now able to sit every morning in the library, and attend a little to his reading, as in old times.

Ada began to look much happier ; and she had such a gentle, loving way of giving me counsel, that even when she opposed or softly rebuked me, it was sweeter than the commendation of some others.

And this was the step-mother whose very name had been a terror to me,—so false is prejudice, so unjust are

those opinions which we take, as it were, from hearsay, and lodge in our hearts, without making inquiry as to their truth or falsehood.

Miss Bartlett was again admitted as our visitor ; for, during my father's illness, she had been almost entirely shut out from us.

I do not think we were very sorry for this restraint on her movements.

She was such a whimsical, exacting, unreasonable person, that it was very easy to get on without her ; and she had a disorderly sort of way of running hap-hazard into conversation, which distressed my father a good deal, and was quite at variance with his systematical way of handling every subject.

We tried hard to keep her out of the library ; but, in spite of all our efforts, she contrived to penetrate it.

If Ada were relating an anecdote, she jumped with a guess to the conclusion ; when my poor father, who had by no means reached his usual healthful state of tranquillity, would spring from his chair, and pace the room to and fro in very visible uneasiness.

At other times, when he was walking thoughtfully up and down by the windows,—as was often his custom,—she would intercept him at every turn ; and a pretty business they made of it together.

He could not understand her love of talking, only for talking's sake; and she could not comprehend how illness had robbed him of his calmness, and made even those slight roughnesses of life a discomfort to him, which he would a little while ago have passed by unnoticed.

## LXVII.

"Don't you be such a fool as to get married, Annie," she said one morning, when she had ensconced herself in the library: "these men are sad people to deal with. By-the-bye, where is Mr. Warren? I suppose he'll be running off with Edith?"

But Ada, gentle considerate Ada, stood between me and these discomposing speeches, warding them off dexterously, or throwing them back on Miss Bartlett herself, with a shrewdness and skill of which I had scarcely thought her capable.

Ada was one of those who are for ever learning; and from the circumstances in which she had been placed by her married life, she had gained much experience: yet she retained her sylph-like look and docile girlish manner to such a degree, that, accustomed as I was to her, I sometimes found it difficult to remember she was indeed my father's wife.

Perhaps there was never before so great a union of real sterling sense and genuine child-like simplicity as in Ada.

The only use Miss Bartlett seemed to be at that time in our circle was, that she gave us subjects for laughter.

At night, after she left us, what hearty bursts of merriment we had !

There was no bitterness in our talk ; we simply ran over all the ludicrous things she had said and done ; and comical remarks from Ada, who was so quiet in general, came on us with double effect.

Miss Bartlett had been unusually irritated that evening, because Ada persisted in assuring her that Edith was a particular favourite of Dr. Slaffen.

She suddenly told us, without blushing at all, and looking hard at my father whilst she spoke, that the doctor was a rejected lover of hers.

"By all that is right," exclaimed my father, "how confoundedly foolish you were not to take him !"

"How I wish you were his wife !" I exclaimed, with an earnestness which brought the blush into my own cheeks.

"And why should you be so anxious on that score, Annie?" Miss Bartlett said. "A modest female must not receive a proposal too gladly. I refused the

doctor, thinking—a-hem—of course, this is only between friends, thinking—that he would again come forward, but (here the good lady hesitated) from that time to this he has never mentioned the subject.”

“Oh, Oh,” said my father, suddenly standing up, and looking down on her in a sort of comical pity, which sent me laughing behind the window curtains: “this may very easily be remedied by a letter to Dr. Slaffen; and if we cannot at once bring him to terms, we can take a high tone, and talk of justice, and honour, and all that kind of thing.”

“Oh, really, really!” exclaimed Miss Bartlett, in a state of unfeigned excitement; “you must do no such thing. You forget my maidenly pride, and how much I owe myself in this matter.

“Dear Mr. Falconer, say that you will never mention the subject again,” she cried; and she laid her left hand so caressingly on my father’s shoulder, that I thought she would have kissed him.

Ada, who had been sitting as grave as a judge, now laughed outright, and I joined her; but Miss Bartlett was not annoyed. She was so happy to think she had made us acquainted with this little circumstance, that it seemed almost to compensate for the twelve



dreary years of maidenhood she had waded through since his proposal.

These were the things we laughed at in Ada's dressing-room by the bright fire-light.

## LXVIII.

WEEKS passed on: I tried very much to look on the bright side of life.

Ada was continually reminding me that I was to ask God not only for comfort, but for hope.

"Commit your way to Him," she said, "and then feel that all will be well."

"Ada," I replied, "it is easy for you to talk thus,—you, who, when trouble first came in on you, sought heavenly aid; but with me the case is very different.

"I have for so long a time been accustomed to battle with my own trials, that my spirit has grown unsteady and irresolute. It is only when talking to you that I ever feel stronger."

"Then things are not with you as they ought to be," she replied, with such earnestness in her voice, that I could not listen to her unmoved.

"You may look to me for counsel," she continued; "and very grateful I feel to you, Annie, that you think

me worthy to give it to you." What a sunlight of love was in her eyes, as she looked at me with the old smile of her girlhood, and added, "But there is another Counsellor, tenderer and wiser than I, to whom you must go for direction, strength, and hope!"

I knew very well what she meant, and I knew by the tears in her eyes that she had sought this heavenly Friend, and found Him very faithful in her great need.

"Ask God. through Christ," she said, "not only to sustain you in suffering, but to let you feel persuaded that, however dark and rugged your path may now be, He will make a way of escape for you."

"Oh, Ada," I answered, "impossible! You are carried on by your own happy enthusiasm. I am fettered for life. It is only by Lynn's death that I can be free; and false-hearted as I have been to him, God is my witness, I had rather suffer anything than that a hair of his head should be injured."

Ada's face brightened up very much as I said this; and she stooped forward and kissed me, exclaiming, "That is like our own dear Annie!"

Instead of being discouraged by the cheerless view I took of my own case, she became eloquent in her entreaty that I would hope even against hope.

I remember it was on that evening that she alluded

to my mother's strange infatuation with regard to my early marriage.

"I can conceive," she said, smiling sadly, "that she might have feared a step-mother, but I regret very much the plan she adopted to shield you. How much shadow it has thrown on your way!"

She spoke of the strongest human mind as being continually liable to error; and she put her arms round my neck in the old loving way of her girlhood, and besought me through my future life to seek wisdom from Him "who giveth liberally, upbraiding not."

Then we heard my father calling to us from the library. As we hastened to him, Ada whispered to me, "Hope, hope!"

We found Mrs. Masterman in the hall. Her visit was quite unexpected; but what was still more surprising than this, she said "she had come to take me home with her for a few weeks, as she and her husband both thought a little change would work out for me a great good."

"It was quite impossible," I muttered to Ada, "quite impossible; that I could go. How could I ever bear Mrs. Masterman's 'sad reverses' to be tacked on to my own troubles? Indeed, I did not wish to leave home."

It was so pleasant to look out on the lawn where *he*

had sat ; so soothing to have my time almost at my own disposal, which could not be the case anywhere but at home.

Ada knew very well that all this leisure was not good for me ; so when my father became perturbed, and almost irritated, at my refusal, she did not, as was usually her custom, endeavour to draw him round to my way of thinking, but she turned her head from us both, and looked into the fire, and at length said very gently that my father was on the right side of the question, and that she thought it would brace my nerves greatly to leave home for a few weeks.

Ada always gave a decided opinion with diffidence ; and there was something drooping, almost sorrowful, in her manner, now that she knew my wishes were not in unison with hers.

My father grew angry with me ; and when Mrs. Masterman was out of hearing, conversing with Ada at the window, he told me he was surprised at my want of politeness in so openly expressing my reluctance.

"How can you expect, Annie," he said, "ever to fight the battle of life bravely, if you shrink from the slightest exertion, if you are unwilling to oblige others at some small sacrifice of personal care?"

It was soon arranged that I was to accompany Mrs.

Masterman home that very evening ; and though, after all, I feared I obeyed my father with a bad grace, yet the pleasant air during our drive had its effect on me ; and in the course of the evening, the light, careless way in which Mr. Masterman took up his loss of fortune amused me so much, that I laughed far more heartily than good breeding warranted, and my sleep was calmer that night than it had been for weeks.

## LXIX.

AFTER the first two or three days, however, I found there was a great monotony at the Mastermans'.

It seemed to me that they had but little to think of—to talk of ; yet they were happy, and to account for this, puzzled me for some time.

At last, I reflected that trifles occupied Mrs. Masterman quite as much as those greater things which occupy greater minds. She escaped from the misery of unemployed time, and this gave her content. What was business to her, was idleness to another.

My father would have died from ennui, if he had been compelled to knit stockings all day ; but she found amusement and comfort in it, and all this I thought was in accordance with Ada's favourite theory, that

happiness is far more equally distributed in this world than we imagine ; and that if we would take the trouble to look around us, we should soon convince ourselves of this.

Yet, though Mrs. Masterman so harped on her "sad reverses," this loss of property had scarcely been a trial to her.

It is true, they had been obliged to give up their country residence, and to take the upper part of a furnished house ; but what was this to Mrs. Masterman ? She was still under the protecting wing of her husband, and perhaps the very greatest of her reverses was, that she had not so much room as formerly for her large quilt-knitting : she could not arrange it on the comparatively narrow horse-hair sofa with the same freedom that she could on the wide old couch of their handsomely, though somewhat antiquesly, furnished drawing-room in the country.

She still had leisure to think of trifling things, and to live for them ; and I said to myself, "that sorrow did not so much consist in the events which befel us, as in the spirit in which we received them."

How heartily I welcomed a letter from Edith !

It was enclosed in a short note from Ada, who bade me prepare for a great surprise, if Edith communicated

to me the intelligence which, in a few hurried lines from Dr. Slaffen, had been conveyed to her that morning.

Oh, what an agony of fear I was in! My knees trembled, and I grew cold; but there, with Edith's unopened letter in my hand, I had to look at Mrs. Masterman's strawberry jam, and to give her my judgment on the straining of the red currant jelly.

It was hard work to answer with anything like coherence or propriety.

Was Mr. Warren really Edith's accepted lover? Happy, happy girl! But Oh! the cold, hard present that encircled me!

I think that, for a few moments, I felt something very much like dissatisfaction towards Edith.

She knew I loved Mr. Warren. Whether this was right or wrong was quite another question. She had simply to do with the fact I had myself revealed to her, that my heart was in his keeping, and how could she, Oh, how *could* she?

"Yes, ma'am, that will do nicely," I said.

"Which, my love, the strawberry?" inquired the persevering old lady; "and yet, after all, Edith had been so much with him, who could blame her?"

It was no use trying. I could not comprehend Mrs.

Masterman ; so, in my despair, I left her questions unanswered, and deliberately walked on to my bedroom.

## LXX.

ALL this time Mr. Masterman had been within hearing, up to his wrists in mud, arranging some old myrtle plants to his satisfaction.

I shall never forget his face, nor the tone of his voice, as he looked after me in a kind of wandering manner, and said, "These young women are strange creatures—mysterious and incomprehensible.

"There's been a great commotion about Edith's delicacy ; but I'll be hanged if this girl's not love-sick." He was talking to himself, and thought I was quite out of hearing. "There's something in that letter that's paled her cheeks. If they don't take care, whilst they are looking after Edith, she'll slip through their fingers. Foolish girl ! I dare say, like half the rest of 'em, she's pining after some man who doesn't care a rush for her. I don't know what to think of these women. It seems to me they get on in the moping line better than anything else ; yet I'll be bound, if we spoke to the girl, she'd stoutly deny that love had anything to do with her queer ways.



"Well, I suppose we must leave her to herself;" and then, quite contentedly, he bent over his myrtles, if not with a mind capable of exquisite enjoyment, yet immersed in a placidity which preserved him from the inroads of overwhelming sorrow.

I felt there was truth in much of what he said; and though I did not like the epithet of "love-sick," conscience whispered that it might not unreasonably be attached to me.

Mr. Masterman had an easy kind of indifference hanging about him; and he would never have taken the trouble to say anything but that which presented itself in a straight-forward way to his mind.

Seated close to my window to catch all the light I could,—for the beating of my heart half blinded me,—I hastened to read Edith's letter.

"Still in Switzerland, beautiful Switzerland, my darling sister.

"I have been many months from home, and never longed more to lay my head on your bosom than now.

"I long to tell you what is revealed more by looks than words,—how fondly I am loved, and how deeply I love in return. Yes, dearest sister, I am the betrothed bride of Dr. Slaffen!"

I started from my seat. I exclaimed, "Impossible!"

I paced the room in unbounded indignation. I sat down and wept ; but even now, as I look back, I can remember that they were not tears of unmitigated sorrow.

I was angry with Edith, Oh, how angry ! She had pitifully thrown herself away, and I was angry with myself. As I am endeavouring to write a faithful narrative, I must lay bare my selfishness. Edith was sacrificed, but Mr. Warren was free, and with this thought was gladness.

Why this knowledge should cause my heart to throb with delight, it is impossible to tell ; for was I not separated from him as widely as ever ? Still, it was solace, inexpressible to me, to be relieved from the dread that he loved Edith, and, in all probability, his heart was still mine.

Then followed the reflection, that, by this unholy gladness, I separated myself further than ever from the paths of uprightness, and was folding sin to my bosom.

I thought of Ada in her goodness, and her beauty, and her untiring hope, and I asked God for strength to shut out despair from my heart.

Gently, and almost imperceptibly, self became less prominent, and I began to think of Edith and Dr. Slaffen.

True, he had always been fond of her as a pet and plaything: he had carried her in his arms in infancy; he had been her friend when childhood deepened into girlhood, and girlhood radiant with promise and hope.

“Oh, shame, shame! How could he ask her to turn back, and travel with him through the vale of years?”

Edith, with her love of sunshine, and brightness, and beauty, Edith,—who, in the familiarity of sisterly converse, had always said her husband was to be young, and intelligent, and enthusiastic,—how could she yield to an influence which seemed to have something deceptive in its very nature?

Then many hard thoughts of Dr. Slaffen filled my mind as I sat there crumpling and twisting the still almost-unread letter.

I positively hated him. He had persuaded Edith to go from home, only to make love to her! How could my father ever have allowed her to leave us?

She who loved admiration as much as any girl I ever knew,—who, with her winning and graceful manner, had been such a favourite amongst those of any one of whom she might have been proud to have been called the wife,—Oh, how could she take at last a weary and worn-out man? What kind of domestic fireside would

hers be? It would not bear thought, and all I could do was to repeat passionately my sister's name.

Yet I had not lost the sense of gladness which at the idea of Mr. Warren's freedom had made way into my heart.

Though I had placed it deep in my bosom, I took it up again and again, and made the most of it; and, as I did so, I grew less angry with Dr. Slaffen and Edith, and at length was able to continue reading my letter.

## LXXI.

EDITH told me they had remained a few days at a small hamlet near Shendensteg.

"Winter is all around us," she wrote: "he shakes his icy arms at us from the mountains, but he does not yet touch us.

"The snowy Blumlis Alp, at sunset, is glorious. All at once it becomes enveloped in a golden flame; then green, amber, purple, crimson tints almost seem to make darkness more beautiful than light.

"I wish you could have seen, with us, the full moon rising from the borders of the lake of Thun. It came up from the snowy ranges of the Bermese Alps, and

under its influence they looked like shining silver, yet softer and whiter; and it seemed as if an angel of light had been tracing their outline on the effulgent sky.

Then she burst into sudden warmth of feeling. "Oh, Annie," she continued, "surely love such as mine purifies and ennobles the mind. I am a different girl from what I was when with you.

"There is discipline in love as well as joy. We strangely come out of ourselves to minister to another, and yet all the while it is no sacrifice, but a necessity."

"Bah!" I exclaimed, angrily, tossing the letter on my bed; "and is she really infatuated into the belief that she loves Dr. Slaffen? I wonder what she will fancy next; that I am to congratulate her, I suppose; but she will find I shall do no such thing. Foolish girl! I shall tell her my mind very plainly this time.

"I wonder what Ada really thinks of it all. The fact is, Edith has looked at life on the wrong side: she has been moped at home with us all till she fancied she could charm no one else but that stupid old doctor!"

I remember that, as I thus communed with myself, I began to feel very wise, and very indignant with

Edith ; but I took up her letter again, and hastily ran over the concluding page.

At first, it was nothing more than a description of the Lake, and of the clear Aar shooting under picturesque old bridges. "I think it is the poet Cowley who observes," she said, "'that God made man a garden, even before he' provided him with a wife.' These are his words :—

" ' For well He knew what plan would best agree  
With innocence and with felicity ;  
And we elsewhere still seek for them in vain :  
If any part of either yet remain,  
If any part of either we expect,  
This may our judgment in the search direct,  
*God the first garden made, and the first city laid !* ' "

I began to get very impatient at all this ; for what right had Edith, I thought, to be talking of poetry and gardens, turning away as she had done from all the romantic and beautiful in life ?

Dr. Slaffen, indeed, with his gaiters and spectacles, what had he to do with flowers ?

I would read the crossed part of her letter another time.

So small, too, was her hand-writing, that it was at war with the twilight stealing in through the window ; besides, too, her " r's " were so indistinct, they might be " m's " or " n's " for all that I could tell.

No matter ; I saw Mr. Warren's name as I was hurrying it into my pocket ; and it is astonishing how clear the indistinct and hasty writing suddenly became, as, with a lynx's eye, and an eager heart, I hastened rapidly through the page.

How delicately and tenderly Edith dealt with me ! and though, from the peculiar circumstances in which she was placed, there was a veil of caution thrown over all she said, yet her heart was brimful of the sweet sisterly love of old times ; and I am sure she felt herself made kindred to Mr. Warren by his unfortunate love for me.

He sent his kind remembrances to me.

I am afraid this simple message made me very glad, for I became invested with a sudden buoyancy of spirit. My harsh feelings were suddenly softened, I may say subdued ; and I grew quite satisfied that whatever course of conduct Edith might pursue with regard to Dr. Slaffen, her sisterly tenderness remained in its full strength.

I will hope, I said to myself ; Ada bade me do so.

I was not only to seek for comfort, but, having done so, I was to try, and feel persuaded, that the clouds would pass away.

I almost fancied I heard her saying, in her own cheerful way, "If the blessing tarry, wait for it."

There was so much strong sense about Ada, so much feeling without sentimentality, that her advice always rested on my mind much longer than that of any one else ; and when she bade me hope, I knew she was not using vain words. I knew how her heart had been lightened in the hour of trial by faith and trust in her Saviour, which anguish itself had not power to subdue.

As soon, however, as the turmoil of my mind began to be a little appeased by these considerations, hope seemed treacherously to draw back from me ; indeed, I felt it had no foundation on which to rest, save in the death of him whom I had taken to be my husband.

This, though I could not perceive it at the time, was the very frame of mind at which it was good for me to arrive.

It was only then that I carried my oppressed heart to God, and asked Him to undertake for me.

Then I believe that the hope of which Ada had so often spoken imperceptibly became mine, or rather that the dawning of it threw some gleams of comfort on my



heart ; and, soothed and tranquillized, I joined Mrs. Masterman in the dining-room.

## LXXII.

EDITH'S intended marriage to Dr. Slaffen was, as might be supposed, the subject of our evening's conversation.

Mrs. Masterman wound her "sad reverses" very prettily round the subject, as if they were the consideration in question ; and Mr. Masterman shook his head and looked mystically wise. A melancholy kind of gratitude had taken possession of him, which made me laugh in spite of myself.

He threw himself back luxuriously in the arm-chair, and said he should not fret any more about the grey hairs on his temples ; for that many young ladies admired that frosty kind of beauty ; and, just raising his head till he could see himself in the glass, he told his wife that, after all, he thought he was a betwitching fellow.

"You bewitched me many years ago, my love," observed Mrs. Masterman, with the greatest simplicity ; and there shone from her eyes, as she spoke, such bright and undimmed affection for him with whom she had travelled on the great highway of life for nearly

half a century, that I thought she seemed, for the time being, to acquire something of the loveliness of youth.

Mr. Masterman, who always appeared to take up existence as a matter-of-fact thing, which was to be resolutely borne like a load of wood, or any other thing, was touched more than he cared we should see. This accidental expression of Mrs. Masterman had roused the smouldering feeling within him, and rendered it brighter, if it did not kindle it into a flame.

Then the old lady, with a sweet composure on her face, took up her "sad reverses," and made such a pretty play-thing of them, that I felt sure they served to soften the landscape of her summer-evening life.

On the whole, I felt much more calm than I could have supposed possible, after the uncomfortable news of the day; and as I lay in bed that night, with the cold rain beating on the window panes, I thought pleasantly, nay, almost lovingly, of them all in the warm south, with the exception only of Dr. Slaffen. It was just, and natural, and proper I should be angry with him. His long years of unbroken friendship with my father could not in the least atone for his having sought Edith's love; so, still thinking very harshly of the poor doctor, and tenderly, ah, too tenderly, I am afraid, of some others, I fell asleep.

The next morning I wrote a vehement letter to Ada,

condemning Dr. Slaffen, and Edith, too, in no very gentle terms.

It was a strange, wild relief to me to do so, to busy myself with anger as it were, in order that I might escape from deeper thoughts so connected with Edith and the future.

How would Ada read all this? It was at war with the quiet harmony of her own thoughts. In some way or other, she would contrive to find fault with my indignation; and if she could not make very satisfactory excuses for the doctor, she would be armed with her general principle of hopefulness; and the very idea of this made my words grow hotter as I wrote.

The answer was so mild, yet so full of feeling, so womanly, yet so strong, that I thought more highly of Ada whilst I was reading that letter than I had perhaps ever done before.

"I could not be a genuine advocate for Edith's happiness," she said, "if I wished to uproot feelings which had spontaneous growth in her heart; if I wished, in order to gratify what perhaps may be, after all, but my own prejudices, to overturn the future which she has hopefully laid out for herself.

"And such a sister as Edith! Would it not be far better to assist and cheer her, occupied as she was by

keeping in her heart of hearts, amidst all its new hopes and anticipations, the most ardent desire for my welfare? and, could it now be laid open to my view, would not anxiety for the dear sister at home be blended with every happy thought?"

Ada knew better than any one else how to probe my heart. She could always make me dissatisfied with myself. I was ashamed of the very thoughts I had harboured the day before, and I grew thoroughly out of conceit with my wayward imaginings.

If ever woman was philosopher, Ada was one: she philosophized over the human heart, its hopes and fears, and her philosophy was not loud and argumentative, but gentle, and hopeful, and trustful, and blended with the beautiful and the good.

Better feelings, that prejudice had trampled on, rose up, and grew healthful again under her influence.

After all, Edith had certainly a right to choose for herself in love matters. Would to God, the same freedom had been mine!

Now and then I had a letter from my father; solid matter-of-fact letters they were, always very much to the purpose, and not without their own peculiar kind of enthusiasm.

"I am quite convinced, my child," he said, in one of

them, "we may hold what doctrines we please, we may expound Scripture with skill and ingenuity; but a pretty sort of business we shall make of life, till we can look up to Heaven in the trust of a little child.

"A great recipe this would be for your true lovers, and all of them; for my own part, I never could steer towards harbour till I got hold of it."

I made no allusion to this observation when I answered his letter, but I treasured it in my heart for all that, and prayed fervently for the spirit of the little child.

### LXXIII.

My life was rather monotonous at the Mastermans'.

During the morning we walked out, if the muddy roads were not altogether impassable.

Sometimes I rode on horseback in company with Mr. Masterman; and this was always a treat to me, because there is something exhilarating in the very act of bounding through the frosty air, even when the sky is overcast, and your companion dull.

The evenings, however, were very long.

There were no short hours now as at home, no silent messengers of hopefulness wafted to me from loving eyes across the table. Those with whom I now was

had innate worth, but it was in a great measure concealed by their oddities and eccentricities. They could not look down into my heart as Ada did, and love me still, in spite of all its dark spots and rugged places. And from all this I was banished, for the benefit of my health!

This sending the weak heart and frame from the household love and the fireside faces, Ada had a thousand times told me, was the fashionable mistake of the present day, and yet she had not only acquiesced in my visit to the Mastermans', but desired it.

I could not help having a shrewd suspicion, that she thought the restraint and self-denial which this stay among strangers would call forth would be beneficial to me; and patiently to mingle with uncongenial minds, is surely in itself a discipline.

Yet the Mastermans were truly and genuinely kind. They told old stories in the evening for my amusement; and when Mr. Masterman gave me an account of his wedding, all his bustling manner subsided, hushed by softened recollection.

"She was beautiful in those days," he said,— "a sunbeam, a rosebud;" and he paused, and gazed on her with retrospection so strong upon him, that he, no doubt, transformed her, by the power of imagination, into the

Grace Masterman of other days. It was only when speaking of her that he ever emerged from the commonplace of life.

And how did she meet his look? If the sunset of time was on her brow, it was a soft, transparent evening, that mellowed her smile, and gave a pleasant calm and benign aspect to her whole appearance.

All the treasured faith and love of her life shone through her eyes for one brief instant. No marvel he felt she had still power to charm.

I felt so too.

I bowed my head in sudden industry over my work, for there was a dew in my eyes I did not care they should see.

And these were people occupied day after day with the veriest littlenesses of life, so practical, so monotonous, I had, till this evening, almost forgotten that the gem of love, though dimmed by care, and almost well nigh lost amidst the rubbish of worldly and selfish feeling, lies somewhere hidden in every human heart.

And just as I was beginning to form higher ideas of this worthy couple than I had ever yet done, my meditations were frightened away by the sharp and sudden knock of the postman.

My father had written, but no philosophizing, no quaint precepts, this time.

Ada had been dangerously ill, and, though better now, she could not do without me, and asked for my return. All his old fervent love was glowing on the page.

It would break his heart if anything should happen to his beloved.

There were tears on the blistered paper, and then gratitude and hope shone out again.

Ah, Ada knew that no other hand but my father's could smooth her pillow like mine, and she longed to have me by her side. It is astonishing how much comfort I derived from the wish she expressed, "that I should be with her."

No longer *permitted* to return, but sent for, earnestly desired in the dear home.

Let no one think his cup of sorrow full whilst there is one human heart whose troubles he can soothe by his presence, one face that brightens into a smile on his approach.

My heart positively throbbed in tumult at the idea of Ada yearning—wearying for me: so strong is the necessity of being loved, that sorrow had to stand back for a few moments to make way for this almost pleasurable feeling.



And my father had forgotten his own nervousness and weakness, my waywardness in refusing to be comforted, all but the heart-thrilling and oppressive thought—his darling was in danger.

I was to set off the next morning, and Mrs. Masterman was in a bustle at once, and would have everything arranged and settled that night for my departure.

I could scarcely believe it was the quiet room in which Mr. Masterman had become enthusiastic only half an hour before.

They had now both plunged into the bustle of preparation for my journey, on which they entered with an easy kind of enjoyable alacrity.

Mr. Masterman oiled the lock of my trunk, and did a great deal of what I thought unnecessary carpentering, with a kind of boyish earnestness which rendered it of importance to him. He positively made the case which was to contain kind, thoughtful Mrs. Masterman's gift of *preserves*.

Whilst we were packing, however, Mrs. Masterman spoke very sweetly and wisely of step-mothers, saying, that, "if they were really children of the God of Love, instead of the children of some peculiar set of doctrines, however pure and holy in themselves those doctrines

might be, they had it in their power to do a great amount of good."

"Ah, what has not Ada done for me?" I said. "What should I be without her now—without her bright example—her gratitude in joy—her cheerful, hopeful endurance in sorrow?"

"Oh God, spare her!" I mentally cried, "in thy boundless love; let us travel on yet a little while together!"

#### LXXIV.

It was at the very birth of the early crocuses—my journey home. They were the solitary mementoes of the coming spring amidst the hoar-frost around.

And there at last was home!—the dear old house, looking at me, as it had ever done, with a smile.

Nearer and nearer we approached.

There were the deep red curtains in the large lower-room, and the bright fire-light was dancing in the window-panes, and seemed in its glad excitement to say, "Come home."

Nearer and nearer still. Ah, they had heard us coming. Two or three of the servants had gathered together at the doorway. Our cook, whom I had known from infancy, was the first to welcome me.

There she stood in her large-patterned gown, (she liked none of your mean small things,) with the same sunny good nature on her face which had so often mitigated my childish sorrows.

"Bless you, dear Miss Annie!" she said, in her most cordial tone. "I'm glad to see you again. It will be all right now you're come back; and I tells master so. I know its all fashionable-like, to send young ladies off in a hurry for every jem-crack of a pain; but I'm thinking they'd be much more comfortable living in the home which God gives them, without running away to try and catch the health, which, after all, may be, they're not a-going to get, neither."

In her excitement, she spoke with great rapidity, so that her welcome of many words did not detain me more than two or three moments. "Papa's in the library," she added; "and Missis is much better, thank God!" and, as I ran down the long passage, the thought crossed my mind, that, in whatever circumstances we might be placed, God would follow us in mercy and in love with the discipline needful for us.

My father hurried out to embrace me.

Very few were the words spoken at that meeting; but in an instant he had caught me in his arms, and mine

were round his neck, and then we both wept; for were we not re-united amidst the shadows of grief?

"The doctor gives me hope now," said my father, as soon as he was more composed. "All Ada wants, he tells me, is rest and nursing. Try, my love, not to be excited in your manner when you go to her."

He had completely forgotten self in the trouble that had come upon him.

His heart was so full of concern for Ada, there was no room in it for any uneasiness about his health, and this had gone a great way towards restoring him.

"Annie, my darling," he said, and his voice was unsteady with emotion, "it would not do to let her see you had been weeping. You must not go up to her immediately."

He took my shawl, and placed it over the chair, then he brought me, with his own hand, a cup of chocolate.

All this would have been natural enough for Ada, and I should have thought nothing of it; but in my father it was quite a different thing.

His heavy trial had given birth to a new forgetfulness of self, which it was touching to witness.

He often wrote for Magazines and Reviews; and this change in his conduct made me think of a passage he had read to me in manuscript the very evening before I left home.

"Some characters become so elevated, so ennobled by suffering, that, whilst we feel for the individual, we cannot help looking in admiration at the moral beauty which trial has unfolded to our view. Like that tropical tree whose leaves are on the upper side of a dull green, and underneath of a living gold, which in calm weather we pass unnoticed by, but which, when roused by the storm, wears a new and sudden loveliness, so is he who is tossed about by the tempest of grief. Patience, resignation, and other good qualities are brought to light, and the strength given him by God invests him with a new and spiritual beauty."

My dear father! he little thought, whilst writing that, how soon he would himself illustrate his own assertion. He was showing the golden side of the leaf now.

## LXXV.

It was very easy to creep noiselessly into Ada's room, but not so easy to preserve that air of indifference which doctors declare to be so absolutely necessary for the well-being of a patient.

Her first look set me crying; but instead of being

flustered and put out by my tears, I thought she seemed to take it as a pleasant proof of my great affection ; and as she was allowed to talk in whispers, it did her good, I am sure, to tell me some of those trivial home matters which, in illness, seemed to wear a considerable degree of importance.

The grocer, she said, had sent over his niece, Mary Williamson, who was out of place, to attend on her.

The poor girl had sat up with her for many a weary night, but never would confess she was tired, and, indeed, never looked so.

She drew me still closer to her, to tell me of my father's goodness, which, she assured me, could not be equalled.

Since she was first taken ill, he had lost all his impatience, and had been the most tranquil of nurses.

He even insisted on stirring the fire himself, as Mary—so he would say—made too much noise.

We thought a great deal of this, because we had always cared so much for my father, and looked after him so watchfully, that we had rendered it almost impossible for him to attend to others.

I am sure it was a comfort to him to be in the arm-chair close to Ada ; and his smile and his kiss were full of gratitude, when he found that I had determined to

take Mary's place that night, and to send the poor girl to bed.

As soon as the house was silent, with Ada's hand in mine, I fell asleep.

When I awoke with a slight start, the little time-piece told me it was past the hour for Ada's medicine, and I began to load myself with reproaches; but Ada looked with inexpressible sweetness into my face, and said, "Why, Annie, to see you sleeping there, is medicine to me."

I had promised my father that she should not converse during the night, and now, though I longed to ask her many questions, I put my hand on her lips, and she turned from me with a smile.

Fairly roused as I was, I did not feel inclined to sleep again. I fidgetted about, and, in so doing, rattled some paper in my pocket, which caused me to remember I had a letter there, which my father had given me to read during the early part of the day. The handwriting was unknown to me; so, feeling no curiosity about it, I had put it aside, and it was only by this little circumstance of the noisy paper that it was recalled to my memory.

To my inexpressible surprise, I found it was from Mr. Warren to my father, saying, that, in consequence

of the illness of his uncle, he was obliged immediately to return to England, and that he purposed trespassing on my father's hospitality, and spending a day or two at Elm Hall on his way to the north. He hoped to be at our house on Wednesday.

"That will be to-morrow," I said to myself, in a perturbation of heart that fluttered my dress, the candle, and the letter.

Now, sleep was indeed gone! What *should* I do? I must necessarily be with him a great deal alone, for my father would assuredly spend many hours of the day with Ada.

I regretted very much that he was coming, and yet, though the thing seems contradictory, almost impossible, there was joy in my heart too. I am sure there was. Yes, it was joy, though with it were blended sundry feelings of remorse.

Was I true to Lynn, to my husband, even in thought, to feel delight at meeting another?

I fancied Ada was sleeping, and I kneeled by the little table, and asked God to give me strength so to conduct myself towards Mr. Warren, that conscience should not have to condemn, but to approve. I sat struggling with the agitation that blanched my cheek even there in my solitude, and trying to persuade myself that I had driven all lingering gladness from my heart.



Again, I almost passed the hour for Ada's medicine, but not from sleep this time.

I commenced the next day with a heart full of agitation and distress. Morning glided into the cheerless, heavy noon, and evening followed sadly.

There were sounds of carriage-wheels, but they passed on and away.

Again,—Ah! nothing. It was the butcher's rattling cart.

I was in that state of watchfulness when the sense of sound becomes peculiarly vivid.

Even in Ada's room I could not control myself; but more than once, under the influence of my agitation, I cried, "Hush! listen!" as if any one else in that house were in my perturbed state of mind.

Ada once looked inquiringly at me, and then I thought the shadow of distress passed over her brow as she turned towards my father.

Another sound of wheels. Ada's medicine glass trembled in my hand.

Twilight was blotting out the landscape, several places were dimmed, but the white road stood clearly out, and I could trace its windings.

Leaning my forehead against the cold glass, I peered into the distance. Something was there—a shadow—

a substance moving. Then there was sound again,—the sound of wheels.

The vehicle approached—stopped at the door! What should I do? Whither could I fly? I bounded up into my own room. I leaned breathlessly against the wardrobe. Every pulsation of my heart seemed a heavy blow.

My father called. I could not answer him from sheer inability to do so.

At last, I breathed a relieving sigh; and to my father's second call, replied that I would be down immediately.

By the little light remaining, I contrived to arrange my hair. Oh! I only made matters worse; so, in a kind of despair, I hurried down stairs.

LXXVI.

I AM sure there was a great want of presence of mind about me. My manner was agitated to wildness, but the welcome was given, and I had shaken hands with Mr. Warren.

I was conscious that he kept my hand in his much longer than is usual for a common salutation; and though I winced under his steady regard of my cold, pale

face, I could not for the world have attempted to draw my hand from his.

I had to bear the test of the bright candlelight at dinner.

I was very abstracted in manner, and made sundry mistakes about the most common things; but Mr. Warren seemed determined not to take any notice of my clumsiness, and talked about Edith. He thought, perhaps, could I be interested about her, I might, in some degree, forget my embarrassment.

But this upset me more than ever, because, when Mr. Warren addressed himself to me, it was necessary not only that I should answer him quietly and rationally, but that I should turn towards him, and even look at him whilst speaking.

When my father had got into a long detail of Ada's illness, I felt more at ease; the pallor passed from my cheeks, and was succeeded by a burning flush, which was positively painful; and when my father, in his simplicity, commented with real anxiety on my excited appearance, Mr. Warren, in an easy, graceful way, attributed my agitation to the news I had received of my sister, though, in truth, I could make nothing at all of what he had told me. But I braved out the remaining half-hour very heroically, retreating to Ada's room with

a feeling of thankfulness that I had not betrayed myself by tears.

"You will meet difficulties like a warrior now," Ada said, smiling on me with her sweet, pale face: "you have sought strength from the right source." And then the thought struck me that she had, perhaps, seen me kneeling by the little table.

After the first meeting was over, I got on with Mr. Warren much better than I had expected.

If at any time I was unusually embarrassed by a casual remark, he went on so quietly with what he was saying, that I had nothing to do but to be composed again; but this did not cause me to think him at all cold. On the contrary, I could not help being persuaded that he took a great deal of pains to conceal from me a certain restlessness which seemed to creep over him when in my society.

As I had foreseen, a great many times in the day, I was left to entertain him; and this always led me to ask a thousand questions about Edith, which any one less good-natured than he must have thought troublesome or impertinent.

He alluded to Edith's approaching marriage with Dr. Slaffen, but in a reserved and embarrassed way, and he never looked at me whilst speaking of it.

I expressed my surprise at her taste. "Though Dr. Slaffen is, in every respect, a worthy man," I said, "and an excellent father, he is altogether unfit to be the husband of Edith."

I saw the colour mantle on his cheeks. Though he looked down, he could not conceal it from me.

He evidently did not sympathize very deeply with my distress on the subject. What feeling could be at work within him?

An old suspicion that I had battled with before rose up in my mind, invested with new life from his tone and manner.

He thought tenderly of Edith—he loved her.

The momentary idea of this made me angry as well as miserable, and I told him I was surprised at his coldness and indifference on the subject. I said, "he did not view in its true light the sacrifice she had made of her sweet youth to hoary age;" but I was repentant even whilst speaking, and before the irritated words had died on my lips.

What surprised me more than anything was his apparent satisfaction that he had aroused me into displeasure; and he was so conscious that this pleasure was evident to me, that he actually apologized for it, saying, "anything was better than the imperturbable,

regulated sort of manner I generally maintained towards him."

Oh, he did not know—how could he ever know?—the struggle I had to maintain in any degree this appearance of indifference; the resolutions formed after thought and prayer; the influence I had received from Ada; the weakness, that, gleaming in my eyes, and trembling on my lips, sometimes led me on to the very verge of a betrayal of that preference which I had long condemned as sinful—as altogether unworthy of one who had a husband's high and holy name in her keeping.

But thus we often journey on in life, side by side, seeing each other's internal struggles, the heart's warfare, through a glass darkly, dealing with our neighbours generally as a blind man deals with colour, and continually misjudging those we love.

"Dr. Slaffen has many good qualities," Mr. Warren said: "after all, he may be a kind husband; and, to use a homely phrase, it is just possible that Edith, pretty as she is, might have gone further and fared worse."

"How can you talk so?" I angrily exclaimed, not unruffled at the easy way in which he used my sister's Christian name, and spoke of her appearance. "I know one far more suited to her, who would be proud

to call her wife." I alluded to Harry Bernard, who had for years been devotedly attached to her.

"So do I," he replied, in a tone and manner which made me fancy he was speaking of himself.

This suspicion was not pleasing to me, and my irritation increased. I grew dogmatical and imperious, and once or twice was so positively rude, that I thought he looked at me with some little surprise.

## LXXVII.

It was astonishing how rapidly, after my arrival, Ada progressed towards health, so that I, who had not been with her during the first and most serious part of her illness, could not view the attack in the same light that my father did ; and, before the week was over, she had taken her place on the drawing-room sofa.

I sometimes thought that my father's anxiety for her might have made him magnify the danger ; but, be this as it may, her wan cheeks showed she had suffered deeply.

My association with Mr. Warren became more unrestrained through her influence. He addressed the principal part of his conversation to her ; and, though at first I felt this a grievance, I was soon very glad of

it, as it was much easier for me to take in the sense of what he said, when he was turned from me, and looking at Ada, than when his earnest eyes were bent on me in sympathy and emotion.

By slow degrees I became more composed when with him, and could even go on tolerably calmly with my light crotchet work as he conversed with us.

Sometimes we actually passed away the whole of the chilly March morning in listening to what he had to say ; for, indeed, under any circumstances, it must have been full of interest to me ; and then the very sound of his voice had a charm for me, so that had he spoken only of deserts and darkness, it would have kept me spell-bound.

But of these weaknesses it is not perhaps necessary that I should speak, even in order to preserve the faithfulness of my narrative.

He invested the old past history of Switzerland with so much life and freshness, that he seemed to bring it down to the present time. So near, so very much a part of the life around us it became, that we gave to it, as he conversed, our hopes and fears,—our warm living sympathies. Our hearts warmed within us as he spoke of those brave men who had lived and died for freedom.



They had turned from the main road leading from Schwytz to Einseidlen, to look upon the battle-field of Morgarten, which is on the borders of the little Lake of Egeri.

"Ah," said my father, kindling up into enthusiasm, "we can talk with horror of the ice and snow overwhelming thousands in these regions; but we forget the avalanche of battle which overthrew thousands of brave fellows at Morgarten."

"It was a noble warfare against tyranny," gently observed Ada; "and though war is, in its very nature, fierce and remorseless, the heroism of those Swiss patriots will live in our hearts for many a day."

"Yes," replied Mr. Warren, "centuries have passed since the Swiss bravely repulsed twenty thousand Austrians by a mere handful of men—the iron-hearted men of the mountains—they rushed on the enemy like a whirlwind, and the men of Schwytz being the leaders, the land, baptized in that battle-blood, derived its name, Switzer-land."

He told us of Arnold Struthen, of Winkelried, a Knight of Unterwalden, who had by himself rushed on the Austrian phalanx, which so inspirited his men, that, in a torrent of renewed valour, they carried all before them.

Several other interesting anecdotes of Swiss history he related to us ; but all this could not drive from my mind the idea which had taken possession of it, that he loved Edith, and was grieving, deeply grieving, over her extraordinary and ill-judged engagement to Dr. Slaffen.

Though I knew it was wrong, very wrong, to care for any other than my husband, the idea that Mr. Warren had given the love which once was mine to another, was exceedingly distressing to me ; and this distress was by no means softened from the circumstance of that other being Edith,—my own dear Edith !

True, she may not have received the gift of his heart : her noble high-mindedness had caused her, no doubt, to shrink from it, as from that which did not honestly belong to herself ; but if he had offered her his love,—Oh, if he had offered it ! Well, what then ? I had rejected it. No matter,—my beautiful vision of his high character had been dissolved.

It seemed to me evident that there was an embarrassment and agitation about him when he spoke of Edith, or why that sudden start when her name was casually mentioned ? He was not given to blushing in general conversation ; why, therefore, that deep flush over cheek and brow whenever her attachment to Dr. Slaffen was casually spoken of ?

The conflict might be past, the victory over his affection almost won ; he might have thrown from him, as useless, the misplaced passion ; but it has left a solitude, a wound in his heart, which causes his strange abstraction of manner, his occasional fits of depression.

All the better feelings of my nature warred against the misery with which these considerations filled me.

Lynn Forrester, who had so nobly sacrificed all the happiness of his life for my sake, who had gone forth into the world drear and lonely, rather than remind me by his presence of a tie so galling to me,—what courage there was in conduct such as his, in nobly walking side by side with duty, even when by so doing he had to journey through rugged pathways !

I could not help thinking of what my father had said to Mr. Warren the evening before,—“that the world had many heroes, of whom Fame kept no record ;” and Ada had answered with one of her very brightest smiles, “Because Fame never condescends to look on the homely walk of domestic life.”

#### LXXVIII.

As I communed thus with myself, I am sure there rose up within me a pure love for Lynn Forrester, free

from any taint of earth whatever, and I shrunk from the regard I had for Mr. Warren, as from an unholy thing.

There was often something in his voice and manner which reminded me of Lynn ; but then my husband's personal appearance had almost faded from my memory. I remembered him only as very youthful-looking,—a beardless boy, asking me at the church-door to try and love him.

Was it possible that spell was on me, and I loved him now ? Was it possible that the tone in Mr. Warren's voice, so resembling my husband's, had drawn me towards him ? Was this all sophistry ? or was I acting treacherously, basely, towards myself and Lynn ?

Had I not thrown aside the love which should have been as a barrier, keeping my heart pure and sacred ? and at this very moment was I not deeply guilty, indulging in an unlawful passion for another ?

I discussed the matter over very often with myself, and the consequence was, that I lost all confidence in my own intentions. What I meant to do I could not tell ; but that I was very miserable, I was well aware.

Ada saw this, and sometimes, in the midst of her

morning household duties, she would pause to comfort me.

I think I see her now, standing with the bunch of keys suspended from her hand, and rattling on the back of the chair.

"I know you ask God for comfort," she said; "but Oh, dear Annie, hope too.

"It is so dark, Ada," I replied, "so very dark, how can I hope?"

"Suppose night were to say," she answered, "'Because darkness is my portion, I care not for the stars,' would not the golden worlds, with their thousand voices, reply, 'Our business is not with day?' and if all were bright and smooth around you, Annie, neither hope nor faith could gem your sky."

"It is all very proper and beautiful for you to talk thus, Ada," I said; "but you have no idea of the trial it is to me to be in daily association with Mr. Warren. I believe it makes me commit new sins every hour."

Then Ada, warming up into enthusiasm, which had something very girl-like and fresh about it, said,—  
"Annie, do you remember those dark nights of suffering by your father's side? What would have become of me, if the star of heavenly trust had not illuminated that sick chamber?"

A reverence seemed to steal over her as she spoke, and she unconsciously bowed her head in thought.

As she sat there with the keys in her hand, and the basket on her knee, I felt solemnized by the spiritual beauty of her appearance. Her high pale brow, her classical features, and finely-chiselled lips, which just then were slightly apart, and the expression pervading all, like a heavenly atmosphere of submissive resignation and child-like trust, would have made a fine subject for an artist.

She did not speak for two or three minutes, and when she looked up at me, I am sure it was with renewed confidence in Him she trusted.

There was a dew in her eyes, scarcely amounting to tears. "Only believe, and patiently wait," she said, as if she were, in truth, the Angel of Consolation.

Was God with me then, that I felt a new sense of confidence in His goodness awake within me?

I would hope even against hope. Not that I would anticipate an end to my troubles through Lynn's death. Oh, no! that would be the crowning misery of my life—noble, self-sacrificing Lynn. Neither would I wish, by any circumstances whatever, to be in a situation to receive Mr. Warren's affections. I would only wish in time to become worthy of Lynn. I would only wish—

Ah! this was the hardest of all—to grow indifferent to Mr. Warren, and, in my daily intercourse with him, to maintain that happy and easy understanding which could not be in any way unworthy of the sacred tie I had formed.

And the spirit of the little child came over me. I prayed; and I left our morning work-room strong in purpose, and with a gleam of light, which, perhaps, might have been hope flickering at the end of the dim vista before me.

## LXXIX.

“We have not taken a stroll over the fields towards the church for a long time,” Mr. Warren said to Ada.

“The wind of yesterday has dried the paths astonishingly, and though the March air is still chilly, there is something very reviving in the sunlight this morning.

“Look how beautiful are the shadows of those fleecy clouds, sweeping like an angel’s wing over that sloping meadow.”

“What, is Ada’s theory yours, too,” I said,—“always finding out something lovely in cloud and darkness?”

He smiled sadly, as he answered, “Perhaps the shadow in the natural world is the same as the discipline of

sorrow in the moral world. What scenery would be perfect without the one, and what heart worth anything without the other?

"But here we are philosophizing," he added, gaily, "and the morning will pass away."

He turned towards Ada. "Mr. Falconer," he said, "will be engaged till evening with those papers, so we had better be off and away at once, now, whilst the fields are so bright in their robe wrought of sun-beams."

Ada rallied him on his poetical expressions, and said she should not wonder if his wanderings in the south were to bring on him the disease of authorship.

We were soon ready. I almost envied Ada the calm of her manner, and the peace which was lying in her blue eyes.

After all, though Ada had had a cutting sorrow in my father's illness, hers had, on the whole, been a happy life; and, though peculiarly gentle in her manner, there was, if I may so express myself, an animated serenity in her countenance, quite devoid of anything like apathy, which I thought peculiarly attractive.

How cheerily she half said and half sung, as we went along,—



“ Up, let us to the fields away,  
And breathe the fresh and balmy air :  
The bird is building in the tree,  
The flower has open'd to the bee,  
And health, and love, and peace are there !”

Those very fields through which I had hastened to the bridal with my dear mother so long ago, and Mr Warren had chosen the very path by which we went ; but how could *he* tell, how could *he* know, the strange wild thoughts which that morning ramble pressed on my mind ? Then I was fifteen, now I am four and twenty, but so retired, I may say so secluded, had been my life, that I had retained many of those youthful feelings and influences which an earlier contact with the world would have brushed away.

For instance, the blush came as readily to my cheek as it did in early girlhood ; and to my father's authority I yielded as implicitly as if I were still a little child ; though Miss Arabella Smedley, who visited us sometimes, (she was *Miss* Smedley still,) called this submission on my part pitiable weakness.

I must not, however, take any credit to myself for this obedience ; there was no principle whatever in it.

I simply loved my father, and it followed as a natural result.

But I was talking of the fields. Yes, every spot reminded me of the fatal bridal-morning,—fatal, at least, to my peace of mind during the long years that had passed since I had so rashly bound myself to a stranger. Ah! was I not even at that moment untrue to God and my vow, by the very pleasure I felt in having my arm in Mr. Warren's? Was I not sinning by every kindly thought I cherished towards him?

What were all my resolutions of amendment, if thus delighting in his society? I lived by his side in comparative happiness; and what made matters worse was the reflection, that I was not only sinning against myself, but against Lynn's noble heart and nature.

I was stricken by these considerations into silence, yet I could not take my eyes from the picturesque little church, the monument of my misery and sin.

#### LXXX.

How earnestly Mr. Warren was looking at me! I felt this, though I did not raise my head.

"Why that deep sigh?" at length he said. "Is this a day for gloom?"

I raised my head, and met his earnest gaze. Never had his voice seemed so much like Lynn's as at this moment.

It took me back to the day, to the hour, when on that very spot he had asked me to try and love him.

Armed by the recklessness of despair, I replied, "I was thinking how very miserable I am. You have not an idea of the weight here," I continued, pressing my hand on my heart.

Ada looked surprised and troubled, and apologized to Mr. Warren for my nervousness, saying, I had not been at all well lately; and he, too, seemed strangely excited, so that I began to feel I had been very indiscreet, and I relapsed again into silence.

But Oh, my thoughts, my wild and wayward thoughts, which no prudence could control, no resolution bind, how busy they were!

I was a quiet, harmless-looking girl enough, and my manner had, to a certain extent, acquired that placidity which is generally found amongst the educated.

But, notwithstanding all this, was my wilful heart tutored? was there anything bearing the semblance of serenity within?

How could I escape from wretchedness such as mine?

I would fly, I would leave the place; yet, that would

be of no avail, for Lynn would be bound still. No, it was death, only death, which had the power to release us both. I would seek the river, the gently-flowing river, that had been the companion of my happy childhood, and thought-burdened youth, and, amidst its cold, dark waters, bequeath to Lynn the freedom for which I so longed; and still I retained a tolerably calm look, and all that propriety of manner expected from me.

We see the tree with its green boughs waving in the sunshine, without even a thought of the damp, dull mould in which its roots are fixed.

But, though thus repining, I was not altogether selfish. I grieved for Lynn. I felt he, too, must be wearing out his days in misery, whilst I, who should have been his happy and loving bride, proud of the dear name of wife, had not only sullenly borne the weight of my secret, but had admitted another love into my guilty heart.

I had tried my best to resist this feeling; and now, as Mr. Warren walked by my side, conversing easily and cheerfully with Ada, I thought I would not receive the gift of his love, tinctured as it must be with disgrace and dishonour.

The longer I thought, the more intricate did the

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maze of circumstances around me seem to become ; and, with a deep sense of humiliation, I must confess, that again the mad idea of self-destruction passed through my mind.

I, who had the advantages of education and example, and the love and sympathy of home ! Oh, how little we can judge by the outward appearance of all that is passing within !

Ada, in her sweet contentment and piety, never dreamed of the waves of thought that were warring within me.

But the servant had come after us, and wished Ada to return on some pressing business ; and, her presence being considered very desirable at home, Ada said she "would leave me for a short time with Mr. Warren ;" and she arranged that our meeting should be at the old bridge, which, although farther from us by the circuitous route we were taking, was in reality nearer home.

In spite of Ada's fresh and girlish manner, there was at times just a little of the matron about her,—a very little, it is true, but enough to give an inexpressible softness to her aspect ; and it was all the more striking, because it was seldom observable, coming out only on particular occasions.

I saw it now, when she felt she was leaving me with Mr. Warren: it mellowed her smile, and rested in a kind of subdued, unspoken anxiety on her lips.

"I shall not be long away, Annie," she said, encouragingly. "Just go on to the old bridge;" and, wrapping her shawl round her, she parted from us, looking the very picture of health and innocence, with her soft glossy hair, and the rose tint on her cheek, which the March wind had awakened.

"No wonder your father so prizes her," Mr. Warren said, looking after her. "Your step-mother's refined and exalted mind makes itself evident in her appearance."

But, though he thus spoke of Ada, his deepest thoughts and anxieties were with me. "You cannot deceive me, Annie," he said, in that deep, earnest voice which ever sent a thrill to my heart. You cannot deceive me. I know the struggle it costs you to keep up an appearance of composure. You are totally changed; and for you, who are made to love so truly, why should life be so desolate?"

He did not know, Oh, he did not know, how he was probing my heart by every word he said. He did not know how this direct allusion to the state of my feelings upset all my resolve to be calm.

I drew down my veil and wept, and told him that never had I felt so wretched as at that moment, when, from his kind manner and the soothing tones of his voice, I knew he was trying to comfort me.

Sometimes, he said, without directly answering me, "I almost believe you are not indifferent to me, that you are not engaged, as Edith once told me, to another."

"Is it possible?" I said, quite taken off my guard, and brightening up into the keenest interest as I spoke,— "is it possible that you do not love Edith? I have been fancying all this time that you grieved over her engagement to Dr. Slaffen."

He laughed outright in a free boyish way, and said, "Edith! why, what made you think that? No, dearest, my heart is all yours." Then he paused, and added, with a considerable degree of embarrassment, "You cannot at present form any idea of the depth of my devoted love."

## LXXXI.

THINKING more and more of the suffering I had caused to so many, and fearing I was letting out the secret of my love for Mr. Warren, I became agitated beyond measure, and my usual caution forsook me.

"Listen, Mr. Warren," I said, wildly, "listen, and hear how I have sinned and suffered."

Then I explained to him how, at my mother's desire, I had, when a mere child, given my hand to Lynn Forrester,—how I had stood in the little church before us, and pledged myself to be his, and his only, till death.

Mr. Warren turned very pale; and, in spite of the chilly March wind, sat down on the bank before me; but I scarcely observed his agitation then: my thoughts were all with Lynn Forrester.

"He was so devoted, so noble," I said, "that when he found I could not love him, nay, that I looked on him with distrust and dislike, he left me. He could not break the chain; but he freed me from his presence.

"As I grew older, I learned to treasure his memory in my heart with the deepest interest. I shrunk from even a word, a look of kindness, from every man I met; and I often carried this to such an extent, that my father rallied me on what he called my affectation and prudery; and for some years, Mr. Warren, no one knew my heavy secret.

"Oh, what a yearning, what an indispensible longing I had once again to see Lynn Forrester, just to have told him that, wayward and unruly as I seemed when with him, he had left on my heart a longing desire to grow



worthy of him ! And this feeling was uppermost in my heart till you threw it aside, Mr. Warren, and made my own weakness an almost insupportable burden.

" But you were not to blame. You told me that you loved me, and it was well and right on your part that you should do so. I only was wrong. I did not turn from you as I ought ; and though I refused you, because I was obliged to do so, I could not conceal from myself that you held too high a place in my heart, and thus I proved myself doubly unworthy of my husband.

" I knew I was cold, and even repellant, in my manner to you ; but Oh, Mr. Warren, I am guilty, for it has ever been an effort to me to maintain this distant bearing towards you."

In my excitement, I had run on much further than I had intended, or even than propriety warranted ; but the impulse upon me seemed irresistible.

Mr. Warren's hands were before his face, but the large tears stole through his fingers : he sobbed, but did not look up. I had never seen him so moved before.

" I am grieving you, I am wounding your heart dreadfully, Mr. Warren," I said. " Do forgive me, but I must go on and tell you, that through all this yielding, as I am afraid I did, to the temptation of thinking too much of you, I have felt that I would willingly die for

Lynn Forrester, that I would trample this guilty affection under foot, to feel that he forgave me, and would receive me to his heart.

"I have struggled hard, Mr. Warren, against the spell that your very presence wrought on my feelings. Your influence over me has, I must confess, been extraordinary and powerful. I seem to draw nearer to you when my resolves to think of you no more are the strongest.

"Sometimes, with a sophistry which misled, though it did not altogether blind, me, fancying there was something about you resembling Lynn, I have tried to build on this imaginary likeness an excuse for giving you my most earnest thoughts.

"There has been, at times, a look in your face, a brightness in your smile, which seemed to call up the old dream of childhood; and the tone of your voice, Mr. Warren, especially when you were grave and earnest, has caused my heart to thrill with a sense of the trust committed to my keeping. But I have betrayed it; and when I see Lynn Forrester, I must tell him how I faltered, and proved myself unworthy of his noble heart, when you came across my way.

"Do you think you can forgive me, Mr. Warren, though I shall never forgive myself?"

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Mr. Warren looked up: his face was ashy pale. "Forgive you!" he exclaimed,—"*forgive* you! Oh, Annie, love you—bless you—for your deep devotion, your pure woman's love!"

"What!" I said, "you do not look in abhorrence on my sin? You do not condemn me as a traitor, and perjured?"

"Judge not yourself so hardly, my dear love," he replied, whilst a look of tenderness, such as I had never seen before on any face, shone from his eyes.

"You are far more precious, dearest, to your own husband, to him who now folds you to his heart, than if your smooth path had been unruffled by temptation; and thus, my beloved, are you crowned with joy for the victory you have won."

Oh, heavens! was it a dream? Was I really clasped in my husband's arms?

"What do you mean?" I exclaimed, trembling till I could scarcely stand.

"That I am Lynn Forrester," he replied, "who, under the disguise of time, and the change wrought by a tropical climate, have been seeking as a stranger to win your love.

"That the great boon is mine, I am now convinced; and this heart, which you prize so much, has ever been

yours in its tenderness and truth—has never for one moment swerved from you, Annie,—though for years keeping its love and devotion apart from any human confidence.”

“Oh, tell me,” I said, “tell me that this is something more than a vision,—a bright and blessed vision, Lynn! my husband!” The wildness of my look alarmed him.

“Annie, my love,” he said, “take courage;” and he pressed me to his heart.

“Oh, joy unspeakable!” at length I cried; “then I have not wronged you. I have not stained the pure devotion of your love.

“Great God, I thank thee!”

It was well that tears came to my relief. Had they not, joy would have overpowered me.

“The struggle is past,” I said, “and I may love you. This was the spell that was on me: you were my husband.”

“Yes, dearest,” he replied, “we have both struggled; and, though yielding sometimes to restlessness and anxiety, patiently endured; and He who watches over us has marked the great strife, and given us the victory.

“I durst not return till time and climate had done

their part in changing my appearance ; and when, at first, I feared you could not love me, Oh, Annie, this was the bitterest pang of all.

"By degrees, I let Edith into my secret ; and, with a delicacy beyond all praise, and with a love for you which nothing can daunt or baffle, she undertook, so far as she could, to smooth my way, and from her I learned that you were not indifferent to me."

"Dear girl !" I exclaimed ; "how can I ever repay her true sisterly love ?"

"This morning's recompence will suffice her, dearest," he answered.

"With her encouragement on my heart, I grew stronger in my resolve to learn from yourself the nature of your feelings."

"Oh, Lynn ! dear Lynn !" I said, interrupting him,—for we could not yet talk with anything like composure,— "to this day, to this hour, I have looked forward through years and years of dreary waiting. I have prized the dear thought of your return to my heart, all darkened by doubt through the long day ; and often, in the hush and darkness of night, it has brightened up till it took upon itself almost the nature of hope."

I told him of my dream just before he left me,—

how he seemed to stand at my bed-side, and how, on waking, I had, in my excitement, traced a dim shadow on the wall.

"I *was* there, my darling," he replied, "and my farewell kiss was pressed on your lips whilst you were sleeping; and I remember I half feared I had wakened you, as I softly crept from your chamber.

"When I discovered, two or three weeks ago, that all your reserve towards me arose from devotion to your husband, I could scarcely refrain from clasping you to my bosom; but I waited, dearest—waited for the sweet confession you have just made. And does not this moment richly repay us for the long dreary years of hope deferred?"

## LXXXII.

I COULD not comprehend my happiness. It was too much to bear at once. I was benumbed under its influence.

"Is it real, is it true," I said, "that I am locked in my husband's arms, that the dear love, which in childhood I could not all at once recognise and understand, should be kept so sacredly, to be shed in blessing on me now?"

It was to me a free and beautiful world which God had blessed.

Never had gratitude such cause to flow forth from any heart as from mine.

God only knows the deep feeling of thankful gladness He had stirred up within me by the rich heart He had given me. He only knew its priceless value; and though, in words, I was then unable to render Him the offering of thanksgiving, the sigh and the tear were intelligible to Him who had thus crowned me with blessing.

"You must let us, dearest," said Lynn, "keep our secret yet a little longer. You will find it a light burden now, as we shall bear it together.

"I am under a promise to Edith, that on the day of her wedding only shall be made to your father and Ada the revelation of the tie that binds us; and Edith has done so much for me, that I feel bound to humour her fancies, wild and wayward as they sometimes are."

"You are right, my husband," I said. (Oh, with what melody the dear name was invested now!) "You must help me to conceal skilfully the burden of my joy."

"You must not look at me out of those deep blue

eyes, as you are now doing ; in fact, you must notice me as little as possible, and turn away from me when you speak to me. If you do not act thus generally, I fear I shall not be true to my trust."

"What, not after you have borne your secret bravely all these years?" he said, laughing ; and he turned his bright face from me, saying, as he did so, "You had better try and see how you get on with this new arrangement." But it would not do at all. I had to run round to his other side, and catch his laughing glance again ; and Ada, who suddenly appeared at the turning of the path, almost saw him pressing me to his heart.

I found it far more difficult than I had imagined to meet Ada with anything like composure.

She came towards us with her quiet smile and tranquil bearing, yet withal so animated and hopeful, that I could scarcely restrain myself from throwing my arms round her neck, and saying, "All is well, Ada ; hope has won the victory."

It required almost more presence of mind than I possessed to look at her in her serenity, and enter with every appearance of composure into a common-place conversation. But Lynn's pleading eyes were on me, and this nerved me to make the effort.



Fortunately, we were very near the house ; and it was a great relief to me to retire to my own room, and during the two hours which were yet at my disposal till dinner-time, to endeavour to get, in some degree, accustomed to my happiness, to school myself to keep my new and thrilling secret as bravely as I had kept the other, all dismal and sorrow-laden as it was.

## LXXXIII.

I soon learned to get on with Ada better than I had expected. True, I was so hopeful, that it sometimes surprised her ; but how could I help it ?

Lynn was restored to me, and I often found myself stealing towards him, under a thousand pretences, even before Ada, that I might feel his dear breath on my cheek, and be even within reach of his embrace.

Such happiness lighted up my face when he was near, that more than once Ada told me the change in my appearance was wonderful.

"I think," she said to me one day when we were alone,—which was not often now, for in truth I tried to avoid it,—"I think, dear Annie, you must have begun to hope."

She said this so tenderly, that I burst into tears.

"My dearest Ada," at length I replied, "God knows that I lean on Him in humility and trust."

This was a dangerous subject to touch upon ; but my tears had deceived her. She did not know that they were tears of joy.

"Oh, why did not Edith write ? When was she coming, that I might throw off all disguise, and proudly own myself as wife ?"

"Patience and courage, my darling girl," Lynn whispered, and I was nerved again to bear on nobly and well.

Miss Bartlett came in on us rather unexpectedly, but then she always came without invitation ; and never had she seemed more frivolous, more tiresome than now ; yet, for all this, her visit was a relief,—it freed me at once from that private association with Ada, during which it was so difficult to meet her inquiring looks with composure.

Mr. Warren, she declared, was an uncommonly handsome man.

"If *he* had won Edith's heart, there could not be a word against it."

Oh, the blessed sense of security with which I now met this remark ! "At all events, my love, though you look so complacent and serene," she said, (my face

was betraying me again,) it is a serious matter when young girls, inclined to merriment, take a sedate man like Dr. Slaffen for their husband."

I had tried very hard to be unselfish, indeed I had ; but I believe this feeling is so closely connected with our lives, that we meet it, as it were, at every turn.

Edith, dear Edith, in spite of all she had done for me, had certainly not so much of my consideration now.

I think I said, at the commencement of this narrative, that I would endeavour to be faithful, even if, by so doing, I sometimes condemned myself ; and I therefore feel compelled to own that I was almost entirely occupied with my own happiness.

It was as much as I could manage to keep my thankful gladness from overflowing in a full disclosure of my secret ; and I had no longer the power to be querulous and discontented about Edith's marriage. Perhaps, too, my feelings were so softened towards her for having aided and encouraged Lynn on his difficult way, that I could not view anything she did through the harsh medium of other days.

It had, I am sure, a softening, improving effect on my whole nature,—the hope, the love, the joy, which had been so unexpectedly shed on my way.

What tried my patience most severely with Miss

Bartlett was the expression of her peculiar affection for me.

I was her darling—her love ; and she would sit in a girlish manner, with her arm round my waist, asking me to call her “ Leonora.”

She positively followed me about from room to room, pressing a crowd of trifles on me ; and if I became in the least degree inattentive, she took me to task, without ceremony, for my want of politeness.

She beset me with questions when alone ; for Ada’s presence always acted as a restraint upon me ; and whenever Edith was mentioned, she was so profuse in her congratulations, that I could not help suspecting there was latent satire in them, especially as she had once told me there was danger in such an union.

#### LXXXIV.

“ It seems quite the fashion for young girls to marry old men,” she said ; “ though, to be sure, your father had not passed the prime of life when he brought home Ada ; and he was not one of those who liked more developed maturity.” She deliberately raised her head from her work, and looked into the mirror, as she said this.

"You must take care of Edith, though," she continued, "even when she is a bride, so young and pretty as she is; and you know, my dear, if she have not given all the warmth of her heart to Dr. Slaffen, there will be danger.

"Edith would never marry," I replied, somewhat indignantly, "if her heart sanctioned not her choice."

"Ah, my dear," she answered, in a sentimental tone, "I know more of the world than you do, and the doctor was very partial to me; and I must say—yes, I am justified in saying—that he could not quite have ceased to regard me."

"Fie, fie, Miss Bartlett!" I exclaimed: "do you think he would seek my sister's love with your image hanging on his heart? I may not know the world, but I know Edith and the doctor, and depend upon it, they will be true to themselves and to God."

"My dear child, don't get into such a passion," she said; "you make me quite nervous." She really was in a terrible state of excitement. "Give me my smelling salts, there, just under the green bag; thank you. I shall begin to think you are jealous of me, but I can't help it. I don't try at it, I am sure; but all my life I've been a favourite amongst the gentlemen.

"Of course, I shall not be able just at first to feel

quite at my ease in the doctor's company ;" and she fanned herself with great vehemence. "To meet him as a married man will be so queer.

"I think, my dear," she said, "you once told me you had never been in love. Heigh ho ! I often wish I could feel less." She had not made a momentary pause for an answer from me. "I am quite sure," she continued, "I should be much happier if I were less sensitive ;" and then she got on the history of her lovers. Ah, me ! it was an endless theme ; but fortunately she did not wait for my replies ; and so thought and I got into close companionship, and steeped in the purest, richest promise of happiness was the future which spread itself out before me.

Spring, which was going on her way rejoicing, bright in her smiles of sunbeams, was strewing young flowers like new-born hopes everywhere, only she wept a little over the infant month of April ; but these were not tears of sorrow. How could they be with the sunshine glancing through them ?

The rain was soft and genial, resting in pearls on the new grass and tender leaves.

"Come here, my love," my father said to me one morning, beckoning me to follow him into the library.

"It is of our dear Ada I would speak to you: she

does not look well, and I fear has never quite recovered from her last illness."

"I thought her so well and cheerful, dear papa," I replied; "but now you speak of it, I must own she is looking rather delicate; but the bright summer is before us, and she will soon be herself again."

"Annie," he said, shutting his eyes, as if striving to hide from himself some harassing thought, "I hope it is not through nursing me that she has got into this weak state.

"Oh, heaven! if I have taxed her strength too much!" and he passed his hand across his forehead as if in pain.

"You need not fear, dearest papa," I said, soothingly, "that Ada has done too much for you. I have long held sisterly communion with her, and I know she feels blessed and honoured in being able to attend to you."

"So she does, Annie," he replied, bending forward and leaning on the table with both hands, "so she does, angel as she is; but, for all that, she has done more for me than her strength could bear. I am undeserving of the wealth of her heart." He said this with a kind of reverence, very different from his usual bold manner, which was extremely affecting. "I can only give her my love in return, worthless perhaps in itself, but Oh,

Annie, as earnest and true as ever came from mortal bosom.

"Her very presence in my home is beyond all price to me.

"I feel quite sure that a little change would benefit her; and as I am tied here at present, in expectation of the arrival of the travellers, could not you and Ada run down to Walmer for a week or two, and then return to Edith's wedding?"

The thought nearest my heart was the separation from Lynn that this little excursion would cause; but when I looked at my father, and saw the deep love for Ada, imbued with anxiety, expressed on his face, the passing selfishness, which would have made me unwilling to oblige him, was in a moment subdued, and I said, if he wished it, I would, with pleasure, accompany my dear step-mother to Walmer.

He kissed me, and thanked me with enthusiasm for my love and care of his darling. He never grew out of these warm feelings, but carried them on into the years as they passed.

I could not help thinking, as I looked at him, that the love of woman in its purity had a blessed influence on man.

My father's whole character had undergone a change



since he loved Ada ; not that he was a bad man before, but his good qualities had expanded under the influence of a pure and devoted affection.

## LXXXV.

So quickly did my father arrange matters for our immediate departure, that, before the evening of the next day, Ada had become quite accustomed to the idea of this new and unexpected excursion.

We had even laughed over my father's summary mode of proceeding, and I heard Ada locking and unlocking her drawers, and walking in a business-like manner about her room. In her quiet, compact, and tidy way, she was making arrangements for the little journey ; and though she had much rather have remained at home at that time, she was reconciled to the undertaking, from the knowledge that she was complying with her husband's earnest wish, and this took from the excursion all character of irksomeness.

How well I remember the pleasant rooms we had at Lower Walmer !

Pleasant, because just before our windows the broad beach stretched its arms lovingly out to the old blue sea, which, in spite of its general character of inconstancy,

had been very faithful to those sands, giving them, from time immemorial, its tides warm and fresh, like a lover's embraces.

The lodging-house part was compact and trim, and testified of careful housekeeping ; but there were tumblers on the sideboard, never weary, always standing there. They clustered round an old-fashioned mustard-pot of graven silver, which would have been all very well in its place on the dinner-table, but seemed ashamed of itself there, set up as an ornament.

Ada and I amused ourselves with all the eccentricities of the place ; but whenever we came to a hearty laugh, we reproached ourselves, as if it were inhospitable to let the room that sheltered us be a subject of merriment.

The owner of these rooms had been exceedingly good-looking, and she had a smouldering air of aristocracy about her, which could not kindle up into a blaze in the material with which it had to do. There was a hardness in her manner, as if life had dealt unkindly with her, and she took this mode of being revenged on it.

What I thought most interesting about her was a sudden thoughtfulness which stole over her occasionally, and then a softened expression beamed from her eyes, as if some touching memory were at work within her.

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"I have just discovered what it is that we miss so much about Mrs. Johnson," Ada said: "she never smiles."

"How I wish she would give us a clue," I replied, "by which we might find out something of her history!"

"Woman's curiosity," observed Ada, smiling; "but depend upon it, when the grief is very deep, it is the nature of the human heart to conceal rather than reveal it."

I was always fidgety and nervous when Ada got on the subject of old times.

I felt then as if there was a degree of hypocrisy in my intercourse with her; and this gave a hesitation and reserve to my converse, which of late had seemed very much to puzzle Ada.

"You have learned to hope, have you not?" she inquired, looking uneasily at me.

"Yes, indeed I have," I replied, turning from her as I spoke, "and it was you, Ada, who first told me to look up, to look heavenward. If God, in his great goodness, crown my future way with happiness, I shall ever look back and remember who it was that so tenderly encouraged and so delicately cheered me when my load of care was heaviest."

"We have not done more than sisters would do for each other," Ada replied, greatly moved; "though, if

we had been associated only in gladness, I question if our love for each other would ever have been of the deep nature it now is."

"All my life through I shall bless God for my step-mother."

"Yet, years may pass, Annie," she answered, "before the sorrow caused by the rash step you took to avoid me is quite cleared away." The tears which had collected in her eyes fell on her cheeks as she spoke.

"No, no, that cannot be," I said, rising, and folding my arms round her.

"I was conscious of a proud enthusiasm, a triumph in my manner, which I could not suppress. God will never let the wound, He gave in mercy, remain so long unheeded."

"Did you observe," I said, wishing to change the conversation, "how attentively Mrs. Johnson regarded you this morning, when you spoke of Edith's marriage, and how her lip seemed to curl in scorn as she hoped the young lady might be happy?"

"Some people, you know," Ada replied, "laugh at what they call the romance of love in marriage. Perhaps she married from interest or convenience; and, having been unhappy in this matter, the very thought of a wedding is painful to her."

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"God grant that Edith may be happy!" I said. "I sometimes fear that her enthusiastic nature may have led her to fancy that she loved the doctor; the beauty of the dells and mountain-land in Switzerland may have invested her association with Dr. Slaffen with a romantic colouring it never could have worn in our more sober England. However, she is possessed of great sweetness of temper, and he will be kind to her; therefore she will, in her true woman's nature, learn in time to love him."

"Do not be uneasy, Annie," Ada said, with that strange expression shining on her face which had so often perplexed me. "Edith is not a girl to marry when she does not warmly love. Depend upon it, all is right, and you will be convinced of this before you have been long in her company."

Ada always had the power of luring me on to hope; and with my mind in its present state, it was not difficult to invest even the doctor with something of the hero. At all events, I could think of him more kindly even as Edith's husband.

#### LXXXVI.

WE had one more letter, which was to be the last, from

my dear sister, as she hoped to be at home in a few days.

Her sweet, loving heart glowed on every line.

Not a word about Switzerland now : she was full of the happiness of return ; and there was a buoyancy of expression, a sparkling enthusiasm, as she spoke of this, which softened, as it were, my feelings towards Dr. Slaffen, which I could not help thinking rather out of place, considering whom she had chosen for her husband.

She had been from us more than a year, and was longing to be at her dear old home again.

She pictured us waiting for her in the hall ; and you could see from her writing that the pen grew tremulous in her hand when she alluded to my hidden love, so happy, so blest, now.

Oh ! her sister's heart was perfect still. Then, under the influence of deep feeling, she seemed to grow hushed and tranquil. She spoke of her approaching marriage calmly, almost reverently, and, praying for God's blessing to rest on all, she bade us adieu.

My father came down to look after us.

Edith, he told us, had arrived, and Dr. Slaffen and Mr. and Mrs. Hall, but so fearful was he of any excitement for Ada, that he wished us to remain quietly where we were till the wedding morning, when he pro-

mised to come for us early, so that we should have plenty of time to arrange our dresses for the bridal.

"Mrs. Hall," he said, "has kindly undertaken to assist me in the necessary preparations, and Edith, dear girl, who, by-the-bye, is prettier than ever, acquiesces in my plan of keeping you prisoners here, with smiles as radiant as sunbeams."

"But you seem discontented, Annie, and you, my sweet Ada, look grave. Are you not brave enough," he said, kissing her, "to meet this little disappointment with a good grace?"

"It is for Annie that I am distressed," Ada said, with her usual unselfishness, "and I feel quite strong enough, I assure you, to join in a little bustle."

My father shook his head.

"Let Annie go, then," she pleaded, "and I will remain."

"For once I must be peremptory," my father said, looking really distressed.

"The doctor tells me any excitement would be hurtful to you, my darling; and I know Annie better than to think, for a moment, she would desire to leave you.

"In a few days we shall all meet, and, with the aid of a little patience, the intervening time will melt away as a vapour, and your penance will be over."

I thought how the dismal months of my suffering had passed away ; and with the prospect before me of so speedily being acknowledged as the loved and honoured wife of Lynn Forrester, Oh ! how could I murmur at this passing cloud of disappointment ?

So I promised my father to be obedient as in days of yore. I promised to cherish Ada with a double share of tenderness and love, till she returned to him, and occupied by grateful, thankful thought, and looking forward hopefully to the future, towards which every hour was so rapidly bearing us, I bade my father a happy adieu. From his voice and manner, I think I was dearer than ever to him as he whispered, "Remember your trust : take care of my darling," and then he was gone.

#### LXXXVII.

THE summer weather lured us out a great deal into the woods and fields.

Mrs. Johnson and Ada were great friends now. Who could resist the spell of my step-mother's fascination ?

She had heard Mrs. Johnson's short history, and the poor woman had grown calmer under Ada's holy influence.

I loved to see them sitting together, Ada with her



musical voice speaking of comfort, and the expression of fervent womanly sympathy lying deep in her eyes; and Mrs. Johnson, though silent, by her very face telling you how she rested on the sweet friendship, and confided in it, till life was no longer to her the barren place it had been a few weeks back.

And who may tell, whether this visit to Walmer, which appeared, so to speak, accidental, was not a link in the great chain of mercy, brought about in love by Him whose delight it is to send His children to minister to the weary and heavy laden?

Mrs. Johnson's more familiar acquaintance with us was brought about in this way.

We had to pass the door of her little room every time we went out, and at length she took to calling us in very gravely and modestly, but as if it relieved her,—saying a word to us.

Sometimes it was to see her little strip of garden as she called it, warm and bright in the summer flowers; at other times it was to look at the sunset steeping the wide far west in crimson and in gold.

On this, her private room, rested an aspect of poverty which was carefully kept out of ours,—a scant, faded look. It lay on the carpet, it nestled in the folds of the curtains, it gave the whole room a discontented,

hungry aspect, as if it considered the meagre furniture there hard fare.

Even the ivy on the garden wall looked care-worn; bold and evergreen as it was, it seemed to have been hardly treated by time.

One evening she called us in (what a strange fancy!) to tell us her dream.

I am almost ashamed to remember how I shuddered and grew cold as she related it, and how at length I put my arm around Ada. I felt so very much all she had been to me, as Mrs. Johnson went on with the dream. Dear Ada! I thought how she had strengthened me to wait and to hope; and so blessed I felt in God's crowning goodness to me, all undeserving as I was, that my tears fell on Ada's shoulder.

Poor Mrs. Johnson! She thought her dead husband appeared to her walking through fallen leaves, which rustled and cracked to his tread.

There was a chill in the air around him, which she felt in her sleep falling heavily on her.

"You gave me your hand," she thought he said to her; "but you did not give me your heart, and we don't like these things on the other side of the grave; and we send coldness to the traitorous heart to testify our displeasure."

"After he had thus spoken," continued Mrs. Johnson, "I thought he slowly disappeared, creeping through a worm-eaten door in the wall; and so strong was my impression on waking of the reality of this visit, that I actually felt the wall to ascertain if there were any frame or door-way there."

Turning towards Ada, and looking as if she feared the very chairs and tables might suddenly become animate and hear her, she said in a low voice, "that she had married a man she did not love, whilst her heart was in the possession of another. I became his wife," she continued, "from interest, from what are falsely called motives of worldly prudence, though I believe prudence is often sadly maligned, and would have nothing to do with a marriage of this kind; and though, to the hour of my lover's death, I never saw him again, no other took his place in my affections.

"My husband by degrees learned to despise me, and then, as a matter of course, to neglect me.

"I was not with him when he died, but at times I almost fancy that his spirit visits me in anger."

## LXXXVIII.

ALL this time Ada, in her gentle, womanly, loving way,

sat with Mrs. Johnson's hand in hers, with the earnest sympathy of her heart shining from her eyes.

She told her of Christ, the Merciful, and how His great work of love was chiefly with the broken and wounded spirit. Ada said, "that superstition was more or less the companion of every lonely sorrow, and that it often arose from some physical weakness." I was happy to see that she succeeded, in a great measure, in dispersing the mists of that frightful dream.

Then she spoke of the bright and blessed hopes which, seldom attaching themselves to a long course of prosperity, shed their clearest starlight on the dark path of sorrow ; and it was very touching to see the poor creature, who had been so long in gloom, trying to look on the light, trying to take encouragement from Ada's words of love and hope.

I learned that day that charity not only consisted in giving our money to the poor, but that sympathy, and kindness, and counsel, were sometimes more precious to the needy heart than gold. And all this conversation between Ada and Mrs. Johnson made me look back on my past life with a deep feeling of gratitude. I thought of the blessing that had been so richly shed on my rash marriage, how Ada, whom I had well nigh driven from

me by my stubborn prejudice, had gently led me on into the paths of hope.

I could not remain where I was, so I gently stole from the room, and sat at the open window in our little parlour, alone with the soft and rosy evening, alone with the increasing darkness, till the moon, partially veiled in fleecy clouds, arose to keep her gentle vigil over the summer night.

To this hour I remember the sense of thankful, grateful happiness that filled my heart, as something of the confiding spirit of the little child came over me, and I could look up to God as Father.

It occurred to me, that, perhaps, the happiness after which mankind are so eagerly and generally so vainly searching might lie enfolded in a right perception of this wonderful relationship between God and man.

Father! At the very word the irritation of anxiety seems to subside, and with calmness, unknown to us before, we can look around on trouble. Father! Is it really so? Then the hairs of our head are numbered, and the grim spectre, sorrow, is transformed into a messenger of love.

When Ada joined me, I saw she had been weeping. There was something more impressive in her manner

than usual, but it was only a mellowing of the bright tints of sunlight. Ada was never gloomy.

One day more! My father was to take us home the next morning.

I became very restless and agitated, but naturally attributed this to my anticipation of meeting Edith, and under such circumstances.

There were showers during the morning, long-continued, but soft: they filled the flower-chalices, and shining pearly drops stood trembling on each tiny blade of grass. It seemed to me as if the atmosphere, to compensate for the lack of a rainbow that day, was giving double brilliancy to the sunset; for it was gorgeous in purple and sapphire.

#### LXXXIX.

IN the midst of our next morning's breakfast my father arrived, fresh and joyous, with all his old buoyancy of manner strong upon him, yet softened by the very nature of the excitement which so engaged him. I saw this at once. There was a tenderness in his eyes, not always to be seen there; and, in spite of the hearty, gladsome way in which he greeted us, the tones of his voice betrayed emotion.

After embracing Ada, he kissed me in a rapid, earnest manner.

My first inquiry was for Edith. "She is well and happy," said my father lightly, "and made happier by the knowledge that in an hour or two she will welcome home her sister."

It is needless to say that Ada and I had everything ready. Before seven o'clock that morning I had commenced preparations for the journey.

Ada had once or twice rallied me on my confused manner and pale cheeks. I made a great many mistakes in packing, which surprised as well as amused her. How could I help it? She did not know, what I so well knew, that, in a few hours, I, too, should be standing an honoured wife at my husband's side. She did not know how my heart beat, and then seemed all at once to stand still within me.

It was a weight on my mind,—the thought of what my father would say when he discovered all; and on this account his presence agitated me very much, and filled me with a strange kind of irresolution. At one moment I felt as if, in my lightness of heart, I could sing for joy; and the very next I know there were tears in my eyes, that a kind word, or even an earnest look, would have caused to overflow.

He, too, naturally attributed my agitation to the thought of so soon meeting my sister. It was well there was some excuse for my fluttered manner, and the crimson which was now burning on my cheeks, he attributed to the sea-air, "which," he said, "had done wonders for me."

Ada whispered a few earnest parting words to Mrs. Johnson, and I know they were words of hope, though she received them with tears.

And then the great iron-railroad had us in its keeping, and we were whirling along, houses and trees reeling and flying from us,—or we were flying from them, which was much the same thing.

I was conscious of a fresh feeling in the air. I knew the birds were singing, though I could not hear them; the trees were glittering in the rain of the previous night; but still I seemed as in a dream.

Sometimes my thoughts drifted back again on the old current to Dr. Slaffen. True, there was nothing stern or severe about him, but he was too thoughtful and care-worn for Edith's bright youth, and this was the mildest view I could take of the matter.

However, this singular choice of Edith's did not trouble me as it used to do—it did not trouble me, because I was so occupied by my own happi-



ness, and so grateful for it. Was this selfishness? I fear so.

"What is the matter, Annie, dear?" Ada said, anxiously, as my father handed me into the carriage, which was waiting for us at the station. I was trembling in every limb. I could not help it. I was extremely agitated, but happy, very happy, for all that.

I told her that, although flurried, I was quite well; and when my father patted me on the cheek, and said, with a kind of proud delight, that my face, after all, would be the best part of my bridesmaid's garb, I felt confused and humbled, and had a longing wish to throw my arms around his neck and ask his forgiveness.

## XC.

MR. WARREN was at the door to receive us. How I managed to meet him with any appearance of calmness, I cannot tell. He looked at me uneasily, and contrived to whisper, "Courage, Annie, courage," which revived me wonderfully.

I was conscious that the servants were around me, all decorated in white ribbons, and that the cook looked very unlike her every-day self in the beautiful silvery-grey poplin that became her so well.

But in spite of all these observations, it was to Edith that I hastened.

It was late, and she was actually dressing for the bridal. No matter ; what was her half-finished toilet to me ? We were soon locked in each other's arms.

"Oh, Annie," exclaimed my sister, "dear Annie, from whom my heart, in its new love, has never for one instant strayed, we are both to be happy to-day. I could have known no gladness, Annie," she continued, her bosom heaving and swelling in its great excitement, "had it not been for this day, so long looked forward to, so long pictured in imagination." Then a hush and silence fell on us for a time, and Edith's tears began to flow. Warmly and gently they fell on my face and neck.

She was in her dressing-gown, but the orange wreath was in her beautiful hair, and her blue eyes, which I had always admired, seemed deeper and more spiritual now from the earnest love that filled them. How could I tell her then of the lingering fear I still had, that she was throwing herself away ? How could I chill her hopes, or discourage her at such a time ? Impossible, so I only said, "God bless you in your marriage, my darling ;" "and God bless you in your husband," she answered, lowering her voice to an impressive whisper. "His

goodness is great and undeserved," I replied, when I could speak.

"Think how soon, how very soon," she said, her cheeks flushing in that light rose-hue which gave such brilliancy to her complexion, "how very soon you and I shall be standing together as sister brides."

"Hush, dearest," I replied, in a kind of fear or reverence, I hardly know which, for I had not yet learned to speak of my happiness above a whisper; "what will papa say?"

"Oh," she answered, gaily, "he will not be angry at such a time: we will not let him; so try and be composed."

"I know very well it requires more than mere mortal strength to bear happiness steadily; but you shall not escape my revenge," she said, in a sudden burst of that gentle playfulness which rested so naturally and gracefully on her, and she raised her small white hand menacingly as she spoke: "did I not tell you I would punish you for keeping your secret, through long years, all to yourself?"

"The idea of your being revenged!" I answered, laughing. "You must throw away those soft looks, and that loving smile, before you come out in so new a character."

Ada entering the room at that moment, Edith said

no more ; but I cannot help mentioning that she looked surpassingly lovely, with her bridal-dress hanging around her, and the orange circlet, I am afraid, somewhat disarranged.

"Old Father Time will not wait," Ada said, lightly and pleasantly, "even for sisters;" and I observed that she was herself equipped for the bridal, so slyly had he cheated us into the belief that we had only been a few moments together; "and suppose," Ada continued, in the same cheerful voice, "that we should find the church-doors closed, what a laugh there would be against us! and we should drive Dr. Slaffen to despair."

Even then, looking as I did through the brightest rose-hues on life, his very name carried me back to its common-place realities. A vivid blush rose to my cheeks. I had never felt more ashamed of Edith's choice than at that moment. Fortunately, she did not see me, she was looking at Ada, so I slipped from the room, and soon found myself in my own chamber, where my bridal-dress awaited me.

It was a rich silk, almost white, but shaded with blue, the very type of the summer heaven. If blue ever could be shadow, it certainly was when hiding in the folds of that snowy dress.

My bonnet was white, with modest blue bells drooping somewhere over it.

I scarcely knew myself in the mirror: my cheeks were unusually flushed; and Ada said my eyes were so sparkling, she could scarcely look at them.

## XCI.

I HAVE before observed that the cook had been with us for many years, and I was her especial favourite.

"Come in here, Miss," she said, as I passed the dining-room. It was a splendid old room, sixty feet long.

"You ain't 'a-going off without seeing of it." There was a slight tone of indignation in her voice. "Come along!"

I followed her, and the magnificent bridal-feast covered the whole table.

I never knew we possessed such brilliant plate before.

It was so set off by the flowers which embraced it, and hung caressingly round it; that its metallic life seemed to derive from them a more lively beauty.

How splendid they were! Gold, and silver, and gems grew dim beside them.

And from the midst of roses, geraniums, camelias,

lilies, and many-hued carnations, you could see, rising whitely, two Alpine rocks of snow.

Those cakes were chastely pure, unsullied by any meretricious ornament; and the white sugar, in contrast with the rich blossoms and dark glossy leaves, had a most striking effect.

"How beautiful!" I exclaimed. "It is quite a new idea to have two cakes;" but whilst I was speaking, it occurred to me that Edith and Lynn had planned it for this our almost double wedding-day. I felt so nervously, so tremulously happy, that the very thought of this sent the tears fast to my eyes, and I was obliged to press them back with my finely-embroidered handkerchief.

"It was Miss Edith," the cook replied, her honest face glowing in the excitement of making this communication. "She says, Miss, to me, looking so sparkling-like, 'We mean to send cake to all the country round, and we must have enough, cook.' Bless her dear heart! I said, she should have the world full, if I could give it to her."

Again my tears made an effort to escape.

Strange that the cook could not understand me when I told her mine were tears of joy, though she almost broke down herself whilst speaking.

"I think, Miss," she continued,—embracing tightly the upper part of her arms with her hands, which, by-the-bye, always seemed in her way when she was out of the precincts of the kitchen,—“I think there is a kind of general sympathy-like at a wedding; for master says, ‘Cook,’ says he, ‘you shall have a large piece of cake for your John.’

“So curious, to think he should pitch on that there name, isn’t it, Miss?”

I said “Yes” mechanically, without in the least guessing to whom she referred.

The morning, the lovely summer morning, was pouring in through the large open windows.

The soft rain which had fallen during the night had mellowed the landscape, and thrown mist into the valley, which was now all rainbow-hued by the early light.

The birds poured forth their gratitude in a chorus of song.

The leaves, cleansed from all impurity of dust, were throwing on the sun-rays showers of silvery spray; and the flowers immediately around the house, as if determined to bear some part in that rejoicing day, crowned their brows with a tiara of diamonds, woven of the night-rain.

The magnificent evergreens formed a stately arch

on the lawn: a fine gothic arch it was; and the effect that this frame-work had on the landscape is indescribable.

It was a soft, purple morning, with the atmosphere like a fragrant breath.

The Dingle of which I spoke at the commencement of my narrative clasped to its heart the little church to which I have so frequently referred,—clasped it lovingly and reverently, as if it were a treasure; and beyond the old river crept on through meadows, and corn-fields, and woods with its tribute of waters, to the far-off sea it loved so well. On to the hazy distance you could trace its silvery steps, and then it almost seemed as if the skies descended to mingle with a thing so bright.

“It’s lucky to be a bridesmaid, Miss,” the cook said, rousing me from the reverie into which I had fallen; “but mind that you have the first cut at the cake, and then you will be the first to get a husband.”

From the way in which she said this, I fancied she thought I was weary of my solitary life. The tone of her voice was so encouraging, it seemed to imply it.

There was a rustling of silk on the stair-case. My father was calling for me. The bride was ready.



## XCII.

I BELIEVE brides are almost always lovely in the halo of the white and silver that encircles them.

There is an airy-light and grace in the gossamer trimmings and pearl-like adornments which characterize the purity of a bridal dress; but it was not from all this that Edith received the grace and the charm which were so pre-eminently hers on that morning.

True, the dreamy, misty lace-veil, falling in exquisite folds from her high brow to her feet, softened all; but it was herself, so humble, yet so exalted in her humility, —so pure, so happy, so brave, yet so shrinking, with the dimple, the dear, child-like dimple, on her fair cheek, and a look in her eyes, when they rested on me, so deep, so full of tender joy, that I could not help saying, almost aloud, "Well may Dr. Slaffen be proud this morning!"

I had wished to feel more mildly, more gently on this subject; I had striven to do so, and now this one rebellious thought of dissatisfaction was an intruder. I would chase it away.

"Now, then," said my father, giving his arm to Edith. He looked very serious, though I could see he

was doing his best to meet things easily and lightly that morning.

Lynn sat next to me in the carriage. I felt faint and dizzy from agitation. He put his hand on mine.

Ada saw it, and I thought looked uneasy.

The church was in sight. Edith did not remove her eyes from my face even to look at it.

Lynn and I entered together. Oh, how different were my feelings now !

If ever in my life I felt truly grateful for God's goodness, it was then—just then, when, with the sweet and happy confidence existing between us, I entered the church.

I recognised Dr. Slaffen in the soft twilight at the end of the aisle, and the white-robed Priest. A stranger was the officiating Minister now. Mr. Rodney had long been gathered to his fathers.

Some other gentlemen were there.

I saw all as in a dream ; but my father and Edith were approaching the altar : this was a reality.

Surely, surely, there must be some mistake. I uttered a slight exclamation. A hand was on my arm. Dr. Slaffen was at my side.

"Wait a little," he said, "and you shall know all."

A stranger stood by Edith, a gallant stranger, with

a graceful well-knit figure, and of very prepossessing appearance.

Ah, he, in the glow of youth, and flush of feeling, might well stand by her side ! There was something so warm and genial in his whole appearance, that he seemed like a sunbeam in the chastened light. Edith's voice was low and clear ; and the stranger—it was very plain that his heart was brimful of happiness, so full that it came from his eyes ; not in tears, Oh no, not in tears, but in such sweet heart-beaming glances, that it seemed to me as if Edith, so radiant in herself, grew brighter under their influence.

And they were man and wife !

How Edith turned and smiled on me the old bright smile of her childhood, I cannot forget. There were love, and pride, and triumph in that smile, but tenderness too,—the old familiar tenderness of our earliest years.

We hurried to the vestry-room, the large old fashioned vestry-room, with its carved oaken chairs, and rich warm carpet.

Then Edith placed her husband's hand in mine ; and, with a look of sweetness and innocence, and yet half-conscious of wrong, and bearing in her manner a gentle pleading, which was not expressed in words, she said, " This,

dearest Annie, is my revenge, the revenge of which I have spoken so often, and thought so much ; for, after all, is not my husband Dr. Slaffen, though the son of our father's friend ? ”

“ Oh, Edith, how could you serve me so ! ” I exclaimed ; but she stopped me with kisses.

I remember there was laughter all around, and the old man did not appear in the least to resent having been made the subject of an innocent jest ; on the contrary, he entered into it ; and warmly, as I knew, he loved Edith, he seemed far happier that his son should possess the treasure which he could so greatly prize, as his daughter.

### XCIII.

THE Clergyman had left us all to ourselves. “ And now, dearest papa,” said Edith, “ I have a request to make of you this morning. I know how much you would do for me at any time, and on this day, when I am so blessed, so crowned with happiness,”—her voice insensibly grew softer as she said this,—“ you will do more for me than you have ever done.”

My father looked perplexed and surprised ; but his love and admiration for his child shone out strongly on

his face. I think he would have given his head to her at that moment had she asked it. Her arm was round me as she spoke.

"You will forgive Annie, our darling Annie," she said; "you will forgive her, and bless her, and be reconciled to Lynn Forrester, her husband."

I knew that not all at once could Edith tell him of our early private marriage; but gradually she explained to him the little mystery of my husband wooing his wife, and under an assumed name.

When my father fairly comprehended that I had married at my mother's desire, and that she intended thus to shield me from the usurpation of a step-mother, he seemed all at once to change places with us, and to become the suppliant.

If I were to live a thousand years, I could never forget how he begged us, even with tears, not to speak to him again of forgiveness.

"You do so, my love," he said, addressing Edith, "because you do not know how much I need to be forgiven."

Oh, we did not like to hear him speak thus. We were so unprepared for this kind of thing, that it affected us more than his anger would have done.

He, to whom we had looked up all our lives, as the

best and noblest of human beings, we did not like to hear him saying he needed our pardon ; so Edith tried to persuade him that he was not in fault ; but either she managed the matter unskillfully, or my father was unusually riveted to his own opinion : he even said that, for the rash step I had taken, he alone was to blame.

But when my father, turning from all this, clasped me to his heart, and, with his noble face brightening again, gave his right hand to Lynn, I felt my cup of joy was full.

Ada, whose delicacy had caused her to withdraw to the window, was engaged in a whispered conversation with Treflar Slaffen, Edith's husband, who was explaining to her all the mystery of my life.

Now she came forward meekly and gently, yet strengthening my father by her very presence, as she always did.

Something angelic,—I do not use the word as a compliment,—an expression really heaven-born, seemed to pass over her face as she said, "Did I not bid you hope?" No one can conceive the effect of her words on me when she added, very softly, and so as only to be heard by myself, "Those who trust in Him shall never be ashamed."

When she slipped her arm through my father's, he

said, "I did not deserve her." He was looking down on her as he spoke; and the brightness and goodness shining on his face were strangely at variance with the judgment he had passed on himself.

I am sure that both Edith and I felt he alluded to some great error in his past life; and though my father could take us, his children, into his confidence at any time, we felt the subject was not one we could lightly approach; and though loving him and honouring him more than ever, we turned from it, and spoke of our own happiness.

We said how blessed we were to receive his forgiveness there, in the little church which had made us one in name so long ago; and as the softened sunlight trickled in through the door, and passed over us, Ada said, "It was the smile of God."

#### XCIV.

GRADUALLY my father's sadness melted away, till it became an impressive kind of serenity.

There was something very touching in his aspect and manner as he stood amongst us, speaking very hopefully of the future.

Tacitly, he acknowledged to us that he was now to

be a learner ; that we, his children, might take him close as ever to our hearts as friend, but, after he had so erred, as guide and counsellor, "Oh, never more ;" and, as he walked on with Ada, with that high, bold bearing which sat so naturally and gracefully on him, you could see a strange new humility blended with it, softening very much his whole appearance, and gently bowing his head.

Perhaps any one, knowing and loving him less than I did, would not have observed this ; but Ada saw it, and, as she did so, seemed to grow up into his strengthener.

I had not at all anticipated this reception of my secret ; and I felt an earnest gratitude rise up within me, which seemed at once to subdue and elevate me,—a strong purpose to be worthier of all the good thus showered on my path.

And Edith, in her animated beauty, hastened on with her husband to the carriage,—so good, so 'grateful, so happy she looked, with a light shining in her eyes, expressive of her pride and joy in being so beloved.

The future was standing before her with a smile, and the past, that only silently gave her its boon of hallowed thought.

Dear Edith ! Lightly and gaily she took her seat



by her husband's side, but with the softening influences of that morning on her, giving, as it were, like the bridal veil, the finishing touch to her moral beauty.

I never had seen her look so charming, and my admiration of her was of that kind which does not awake smiles. No, no ! Strange fabric this human heart of ours ! it has more to do with tears.

Lynn and I walked home together.

Out into the bright summer morning we passed ; but Lynn did not ask me now to try and love him. He only spoke of the blessing of having won my love ; and I, who had been so wrong, so very wrong, who had been acting in the dark, battling with the love that would not be stifled as a dire sin, hoping, doubting, resolving, despairing, over all this the right had triumphed ; and, dangerously situated as I had been, I had never even felt a passing love for any other than my husband.

Oh ! God's goodness was very great ; and His smile, His blessing, seemed wafted to us on that serene and balmy morning.

It was during that homeward walk that Lynn referred to his parting from me so shortly after our marriage.

He told me how he had stood at my bed-side the night before, and prayed God that he might one day be

united to me in love; how he had vowed, whilst standing there, never to come forward as my husband, till he had won the heart so priceless in its value to him.

Then I remembered my dream, which I related to him,—how I had fancied, on waking suddenly, that a shadow darkened the wall, and how my heart had died within me as I listened to the sound of the carriage-wheels which bore him from me.

As I recal all this now in my quiet matron happiness, I try to smile at my enthusiasm, but I cannot.

Something steals over me, that makes me feel very subdued and childlike; and a trembling gratitude for the dear love still so fondly mine is stirred up within me.

I seem to hear my own voice rising up out of the past, and saying as I said on that happy morning.

Oh, happiness unutterable! to be able thus to speak unreservedly to my husband! Oh, joy to feel that, through all these long years, my heart has been in his keeping!

As we walked on, he told me I could form no idea of his great love for me.

But I thought I could form a very just idea of it. I thought then, as I looked into his eyes, I could see traces of all the fear, and doubt, and sorrow, through

which he had passed ; and I thought that this discipline had given a strength and character to his love, making it all the more precious to me ; and laying this conviction in my heart with as much delight as the miser places another piece of gold in his chest, we reached home.

## XCV.

“ So it ’s you who ’ve been playing of us all a trick,” said the cook, kissing my hand with the utmost fervour.

Edith had explained to her about my marriage.

“ To think of the depth of you now,” she said, in a patronizing, forgiving sort of way, “ looking on them two cakes, and knowing so well all the time what one on ’em was for. Oh dear, dear ! I havn’t a word to say, but that you’re welcome, and God bless you both !” and then her strong, honest feeling could hold out no longer, but ran down her cheeks in tears.

Good creature ! I put my arms round her neck, and kissed her, and thanked her for her love.

I had been talking longer to Lynn than I thought. To this day I have never been able satisfactorily to account to myself for the rapidity with which that half-hour flew by. I quite believe that old Father Time played some of his fairy tricks with us on that happy

morning ; for we all know he takes great liberties with those whose minds and hearts are occupied.

They were all assembled in the dining-room, and Dr. Slaffen led me up to the head of the table, where I took my seat next the bride, where gradually, one after another, I recognised at the table Mr. and Mrs. Hall, Mr. and Mrs. Masterman, Miss Bartlett, and Arabella Smedley, who, in compliance with an old promise of girlhood, had been invited to Edith's wedding.

There was a considerable degree of surprise amongst the guests, when it was announced that I, too, was virtually a bride on that day ; but my father spoke so admirably, so very much to the purpose, saying that, for reasons into which he could not now enter, my marriage had remained unrevealed till that day, a day which had made him a proud and happy man, and filled him with gratitude, that all the ladies present were greatly moved, and Mrs. Masterman weeps, and looks very much as if she would like to give her excited feelings vent, by making mention of her "sad reverses."

Miss Arabella positively forgets her affectation, and listens quietly in the most natural manner.

Mrs. Hall is the first to recover herself. In her quiet, busy, housekeeping way, she is soon looking out again to see that all is going on right.

As for Miss Bartlett, the only effect which the excitement of the day has on her, is to make her very demonstrative towards Dr. Slaffen, whom she feels to be, in a great measure, again her property, and therefore considers a certain unreserve of manner allowable, and even consistent with that maidenly reserve of which she had so often spoken to us.

Toasts were given, and blessings showered on our heads like rain. Warmly and heartily they descended, and gratefully and thankfully they were received.

Afterwards, as I was going upstairs to put on my travelling-dress, my father beckoned me to him in the library.

He made me sit down by his side. "I would not darken this day of joy and thankfulness," he said; "but, my dearest child, it behoves me to tell you why I so need forgiveness."

The door was shut. We could only hear the breeze rustling amongst the trees, and whispering to the lowly grass flowers.

In a frank, manly, yet humble way, he gave me his confidence, placing first before me a high standard of goodness, and then showing me, or rather endeavouring to convince me, how far below it his path had been. But I only thought of him all the more highly for the

unshrinking way in which he told me of his errors ; and I could not help feeling how elevated and strong must be the mind which could thus, from a high and noble sense of duty, lay bare to his child its deviations from the right.

I cannot reveal the confidences of that interview : suffice it to say, that the suspicion I had so long entertained, that my father and mother were not very happy together, grew into a certainty ; that he blamed himself much for his want of devotion to her, saying that from all this arose her desire for my early marriage ; that he became dearer to me than ever as he thus communed with me ; and that, when I put my arms round his neck, and sobbed on his shoulder, it was happiness, only grateful happiness, that caused my tears.

Lynn and I were the first to set off.

I am sure that every one had determined not to say farewell.

Smiling through her deep feelings at the old doorway, and with a heavenly expression on her sweet face, Ada might justly have personified the Angel of Hope.

Edith stoutly asserted there were no adieux whatever in the transactions of the day ; though how she managed to satisfy herself on that point, I could never exactly tell.

I saw cook receive a large piece of wedding-cake for her John ; and I, passing on into the carriage, and feeling Lynn's dear arms round me, and leaning my head on his shoulder, felt that the joy of that moment repaid me for all the long years of "hope deferred,"—for all the fear, the anguish, the remorse, which had pressed so heavily on my heart.

## XCVI.

REPORT said—but we are not bound implicitly to believe it—that Ada sat more than ever in the library with my father after Edith and I had ceased to be the inmates of Elm Hall.

And then scandal put in a word, and said that Miss Bartlett contrived to be a great deal alone with the doctor, whilst remaining as a guest at my father's ; that she fluttered, and whispered, and fidgeted around him, saying nothing in the least derogatory to that maiden reserve of which she made such boast ; that at length Dr. Slaffen was reminded of the love-vows he had breathed to her on a former occasion, and renewed them.

Ill-natured people say that she brought the subject to his recollection ; but it is uncharitable to suppose she could so far forget what was due to herself.

No one knows exactly how the matter was brought about, but most certainly during the autumn following Edith's marriage, and the revelation of mine, as Ada was sitting cosily before the fire, her head leaning on my father's shoulder, she was startled out of her repose by the sudden announcement of visitors, and Dr. Slaffen and Miss Bartlett entered.

Dear Ada! how she brightens up, when she tells us the story, which she has done a great many times, making us laugh more and more at every narration.

Miss Bartlett was dressed in much gayer style than usual,—the eye-glass, watch, and large brooch, were in a state of brilliant coruscation; and the doctor, very quiet and professional, and very much ashamed of himself.

For some time, they could not let out their secret. At length, the doctor, suddenly rising, and putting his hand on my father's arm, exclaimed, "Falconer, I've made a fool of myself!" on which Miss Bartlett uttered a soft, low, remonstrative exclamation, which immediately enlightened Ada as to the real state of things.

Then Ada and my father wished them joy, on which Miss Bartlett tittered, and the doctor became more professional, and more ashamed of himself than ever.

Well, well, what cause I have for gratitude! I can



hardly think that I have been so happy, so blest, for some half dozen years.

It is a pleasure to me, a very great pleasure, to send my thoughts wandering back over the past, especially when my husband, with his bright, benevolent face, is sitting near me, and looking down on me.

Sometimes he says, "I know very well what my darling is thinking of, when she looks so intently into the red coals."

At other times, he insists I never should have loved him so well, if it had not been for the great heart-struggle I had undergone when he wooed me in disguise.

His smile always grows very tender when he makes any allusion to the past, and then he is sure to address me by one of those endearing pet names which are sacred to love and home.

And next to this sitting in the fire-light, with my husband and memory as companions, is the happiness of having my dear step-mother with me, and of saying to her, "Ada, dearest, don't you remember, Oh! don't you remember?"

THE END.





the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are employed in the public sector has increased by 1.5 million, from 2.5 million in 1980 to 4 million in 1995. The public sector has become a major employer in the UK, and its growth has been a major factor in the overall growth of the economy.

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NEW EDITION OF CAPTAIN BURTON'S NARRATIVE OF HIS  
PILGRIMAGE TO MEDINA AND MECCA.

Personal Narrative  
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